

FIFTH EDITION  
FULLY REVISED AND EXPANDED

# THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE

NEW REVISED  
STANDARD VERSION

AN ECUMENICAL  
STUDY BIBLE



# **THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE**

Fully Revised  
Fifth Edition

New Revised Standard Version



Fully Revised Fifth Edition

# **THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE**

New Revised  
Standard Version

An Ecumenical Study Bible

Michael D. Coogan, *Editor*

Marc Z. Brettler, Carol A. Newsom,  
and PHEME PERKINS, *Associate Editors*



**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford New York

Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi Kuala Lumpur  
Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in

Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece Guatemala  
Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore South Korea Switzerland  
Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford. It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.

Copyright © 2018 by Oxford University Press USA

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of Oxford University Press USA

The New Oxford Annotated Bible copyright © 1973, 1977, 1991, 2001, 2007, 2010 by Oxford University Press.

The Oxford Annotated Bible copyright © 1962 by Oxford University Press.

The Oxford Annotated Apocrypha copyright © 1965, 1977, 1991, 2001, 2010 by Oxford University Press.

Published by Oxford University Press USA.

198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

<http://www.oup.com/us>

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press.

Scripture quotations are from The New Revised Standard Version Bible with the Apocrypha. Copyright © 1989 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Permission to quote from the New Revised Standard Version Bible must be requested from:

NCC Rights Department

Riggins International Rights Services, Inc.

3923 28<sup>th</sup> Street SE, Suite #352

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

Design and typesetting by 2K/DENMARK AS, Denmark.

# CONTRIBUTORS

Contributor	Book(s)	Contributor	Book(s)
Richard S. Ascough	<i>1 and 2 Thessalonians</i>	Bernard M. Levinson	<i>Deuteronomy</i>
Jennifer K. Berenson	<i>Ephesians, Colossians</i>	Christopher R. Matthews	<i>Acts</i>
Adele Berlin	<i>Lamentations</i>	Steven L. McKenzie	<i>1 and 2 Samuel</i>
M. Eugene Boring	<i>1 Peter</i>	Carol Meyers	<i>Exodus</i>
Brennan W. Breed	<i>Ecclesiastes (with Davis Hankins)</i>	Margaret M. Mitchell	<i>Pastorals, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon</i>
Alexandra R. Brown	<i>2 Corinthians</i>	Gregory Mobley	<i>Judges, Hosea, Amos, Micah</i>
Terrance Callan	<i>2 Peter, Jude</i>	Judith H. Newman	<i>Psalms 151</i>
Timothy B. Cargal	<i>James</i>	Julia M. O'Brien	<i>The Prophetical Books, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah</i>
David Carr	<i>Genesis</i>	Carolyn Osiek	<i>Philippians</i>
Richard J. Clifford	<i>Psalms</i>	PHEME PERKINS	<i>1, 2, and 3 John</i>
David J. A. Clines	<i>Job</i>	David L. Petersen	<i>Joel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi</i>
Colleen Conway	<i>John</i>	Thomas Römer	<i>1 and 2 Kings</i>
Stephen L. Cook	<i>Ezekiel</i>	Jean-Pierre Ruiz	<i>Revelation</i>
J. R. C. Cousland	<i>Matthew</i>	Marion L. Soards	<i>Luke</i>
Sidnie White Crawford	<i>Languages of the Bible</i>	Jeffrey Stackert	<i>Leviticus</i>
David A. de Silva	<i>Hebrews</i>	Louis Stulman	<i>Jeremiah</i>
Thomas B. Dozeman	<i>Numbers</i>	Marvin A. Sweeney	<i>Isaiah</i>
Tamara Cohn Eskenazi	<i>Ezra, Nehemiah</i>	Emma Wasserman	<i>Galatians</i>
J. Cheryl Exum	<i>Song of Solomon</i>	Laurence L. Welborn	<i>1 Corinthians</i>
Davis Hankins	<i>Ecclesiastes (with Brennan W. Breed)</i>	Amy C. Merrill Willis	<i>Daniel</i>
Suzanne Watts Henderson	<i>Mark</i>	Christine Roy Yoder	<i>Proverbs</i>
Ann Jervis	<i>Romans</i>	K. Lawson Younger, Jr.	<i>Joshua</i>
Gary N. Knoppers	<i>1 and 2 Chronicles</i>	Yair Zakovitch	<i>Ruth, Jonah</i>
Mary Joan Winn Leith	<i>Esther</i>		

Marc Z. Brettler: *The Pentateuch; The Historical Books; The Poetical and Wisdom Books, The Canons of the Bible* [with PHEME PERKINS]; *The Hebrew Bible's Interpretation of Itself; Jewish Interpretation in the Premodern Era*

Michael D. Coogan: *Textual Criticism* [with PHEME PERKINS]; *Translations of the Bible into English* [with PHEME PERKINS]; *The Interpretation of the Bible: From the Nineteenth to the Mid-twentieth Centuries; The Geography of the Bible; The Ancient Near East; Time* [with PHEME PERKINS]

Carol A. Newsom: *Contemporary Methods in Biblical Study; The Persian and Hellenistic Periods*

PHEME PERKINS: *The Gospels; Letters/Epistles in the New Testament; The Canons of the Bible* [with Marc Z. Brettler]; *Textual Criticism* [with Michael D. Coogan]; *Translation of the Bible into English* [with Michael D. Coogan]; *The New Testament Interprets the Jewish Scriptures; The Roman Period; Time* [with Michael D. Coogan]



# CONTENTS

Maps, Charts, and Diagrams . . . . .	.xi
The Editors' Preface . . . . .	.xiii
To the Reader . . . . .	.xv
Alphabetical Listing of the Books of the Bible . . . . .	.xix
List of Abbreviations . . . . .	.xxi

## The Hebrew Bible

### THE PENTATEUCH

Introduction . . . . .	3	Leviticus . . . . .	143
Genesis . . . . .	7	Numbers . . . . .	187
Exodus . . . . .	81	Deuteronomy . . . . .	247

### THE HISTORICAL BOOKS

Introduction . . . . .	315	2 Kings (4 Kingdoms in Greek) . . . . .	539
Joshua . . . . .	321	1 Chronicles (1 Paralipomenon in Greek) . . . . .	583
Judges . . . . .	359	2 Chronicles (2 Paralipomenon in Greek) . . . . .	625
Ruth . . . . .	397	Ezra (2 Esdras in Greek) . . . . .	675
1 Samuel (1 Kingdoms in Greek) . . . . .	405	Nehemiah (2 Esdras in Greek) . . . . .	693
2 Samuel (2 Kingdoms in Greek) . . . . .	453	Esther . . . . .	715
1 Kings (3 Kingdoms in Greek) . . . . .	493		

### THE POETICAL AND WISDOM BOOKS

Introduction . . . . .	729	Proverbs . . . . .	905
Job . . . . .	735	Ecclesiastes . . . . .	945
Psalms . . . . .	781	Song of Solomon . . . . .	961

### THE PROPHETIC BOOKS

Introduction . . . . .	971	Obadiah . . . . .	1315
Isaiah . . . . .	977	Jonah . . . . .	1319
Jeremiah . . . . .	1069	Micah . . . . .	1325
Lamentations . . . . .	1163	Nahum . . . . .	1335
Ezekiel . . . . .	1175	Habakkuk . . . . .	1341
Daniel . . . . .	1249	Zephaniah . . . . .	1347
Hosea . . . . .	1275	Haggai . . . . .	1353
Joel . . . . .	1291	Zechariah . . . . .	1357
Amos . . . . .	1299	Malachi . . . . .	1371



## The New Testament

### THE GOSPELS

Introduction .....	1379	Luke.....	1467
Matthew.....	1383	John.....	1519
Mark .....	1431		

The Acts of the Apostles.....	1557
-------------------------------	------

### LETTERS/EPISTLES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Introduction .....	1611	2 Timothy .....	1735
Romans .....	1613	Titus .....	1741
1 Corinthians.....	1637	Philemon .....	1745
2 Corinthians .....	1663	Hebrews.....	1749
Galatians .....	1679	James .....	1767
Ephesians.....	1691	1 Peter.....	1775
Philippians.....	1701	2 Peter .....	1783
Colossians .....	1707	1 John .....	1789
1 Thessalonians .....	1715	2 John .....	1797
2 Thessalonians .....	1721	3 John .....	1799
Introduction to the Pastoral Epistles .....	1725	Jude.....	1801
1 Timothy.....	1727		

Revelation.....	1805
-----------------	------

## General Essays, Tables

<b>THE CANONS OF THE BIBLE</b> .....	1837
The Hebrew Bible .....	1837
The Greek Bible .....	1840
Textual Criticism .....	1843
Languages of the Bible .....	1848
Translation of the Bible into English .....	1852
<b>INTERPRETATION</b>	
The Hebrew Bible's Interpretation of Itself .....	1856
The New Testament Interprets the Jewish Scriptures .....	1859
Jewish Interpretation in the Premodern Era .....	1863
Christian Interpretation in the Premodern Era .....	1869
The Interpretation of the Bible: From the Nineteenth to the Mid-twentieth Centuries .....	1877
Contemporary Methods in Biblical Study .....	1883
The Geography of the Bible .....	1890
<b>CULTURAL CONTEXTS</b>	
The Ancient Near East .....	1892
The Persian and Hellenistic Periods .....	1898
The Roman Period .....	1903
<b>TABLES</b>	
Timeline .....	1910
Chronological Table of Rulers .....	1914
Weights and Measures .....	1918
Time (including Calendar) .....	1919
Parallel Texts .....	1922
Chapter/Verse Differences .....	1927
<b>TRANSLATIONS OF ANCIENT TEXTS</b> .....	1930
<b>GLOSSARY</b> .....	1933
<b>INDEX TO THE STUDY MATERIALS</b> .....	1953
<b>COLOR MAPS FOLLOW THE LAST PAGE OF TEXT</b>	



# MAPS, CHARTS, AND DIAGRAMS

## Hebrew Bible

The table of nations . . . . .	23	The kingdom of David . . . . .	461, 601
The geography of the ancestral narratives . . . . .	28	The sons of David . . . . .	469
The genealogy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . . . .	63	Solomon's twelve administrative districts . . . . .	503
The Nile Delta and the Sinai Peninsula . . . . .	101	The Temple and palace of Solomon . . . . .	506
The structure of the Tabernacle . . . . .	120	The Divided Monarchy . . . . .	519, 638
The route of the spies in Numbers 13 . . . . .	209	The geography of the Elijah narratives . . . . .	529
Conflicts in the Negeb and Transjordan . . . . .	220	The geography of the Elisha narratives . . . . .	541
The territory of the Transjordan tribes . . . . .	239	Assyria and Israel and Judah . . . . .	568, 663
The boundaries of the promised land . . . . .	241	Places associated with Sennacherib's invasion of Judah . . . . .	572, 665
The circuit via Transjordan . . . . .	253	Important cities in Judah in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE . . . . .	575
The numbering of the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) in Deuteronomy 5.6–18 . . . . .	260	Babylon and Judah in the early sixth century BCE . . . . .	575, 672, 1136
What Moses saw from Mt. Nebo . . . . .	312	The Temple of Solomon . . . . .	629
The conquest of Canaan according to the book of Joshua . . . . .	325	The kingdom of Solomon . . . . .	635
The Levitical cities . . . . .	351, 593	Judah and its neighbors in Ezra-Nehemiah . . . . .	690
Tribal conquest . . . . .	361	Jerusalem in the time of Nehemiah . . . . .	694
The geography of the book of Judges . . . . .	365	Places mentioned in the oracles against foreign nations . . . . .	998, 1145, 1211, 1301, 1350
The Benjaminite War . . . . .	391	The last kings of Judah in the book of Jeremiah . . . . .	1070
The activity of Samuel . . . . .	409	Tribal territories in the restored Israel . . . . .	1244
Wanderings of the ark of the covenant . . . . .	412		
The kingdom of Saul . . . . .	417		
David's early career and his flight from Saul . . . . .	432		

## New Testament

Four Source Hypothesis . . . . .	1381	Second missionary journey of Paul . . . . .	1587
The geography of the Gospel of Matthew . . . . .	1415	Third missionary journey of Paul . . . . .	1593
The geography of the Gospel of Mark . . . . .	1444	Paul's journey to Rome . . . . .	1607
The geography of the Gospel of Luke . . . . .	1503	Places mentioned in Galatians 1–2 . . . . .	1682
The geography of the Gospel of John . . . . .	1525	Similar passages in Ephesians and Colossians . . . . .	1692
The native lands of Pentecost pilgrims . . . . .	1562	Similar passages in 2 Peter and Jude . . . . .	1784
Early Christian missionary activities . . . . .	1573	The seven churches . . . . .	1810
First missionary journey of Paul . . . . .	1582		



# THE EDITORS' PREFACE

For over five decades *The Oxford Annotated Bible* and its successor *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* have served generations of readers and students as a study Bible. That extraordinary longevity is eloquent testimony to its success. This fifth edition retains the format and features that have proven so attractive. At the same time, the field of biblical studies has not been static, and this edition is a thoroughgoing revision of the previous ones. In particular, the editors have recruited contributors from a wide diversity of backgrounds and of scholarly approaches to the biblical traditions. In order to present this diversity more fully, the introductions to the biblical books, the maps and charts, the annotations, and the study materials at the end of the book have been significantly enhanced.

For this edition the editors have thoroughly revised the study materials and commissioned new materials where appropriate. There is a new essay on "The Languages of the Bible," and the table on "Calendars" has been augmented with an explanatory essay on the differing methods of accounting for time in the ancient world. "Parallel Texts" now includes parallels to the Synoptic Gospels in the Gospel of John. There is a table of "Chapter and Verse Differences" between standard English translations and the Hebrew Bible's numbering. As always, everything has gone through multiple readings by several editors and revisions by the editorial board and the contributors.

The editors recognize that no single interpretation or approach is sufficient for informed reading of these ancient texts, and have aimed at inclusivity of interpretive strategies. On a great number of issues there is a consensus among scholars, and the contributors have been encouraged to present such consensus when it exists. Where it has broken down, and has not yet re-formed, alternatives are mentioned. Moreover, in order to respect the canonical status of various parts of the Bible for different communities, and to avoid privileging any book or part of the Bible, the editors have kept both introductions and annotations roughly proportionate to the length of the books, while recognizing that some parts require more elaboration than others.

The editorial process was collaborative. Each contribution was read in its entirety by at least three of the editors, and revised with a view toward consistency of tone, coherence of approach, and completeness of coverage. The editors have also wanted to allow the contributors' own voices to be heard, and have avoided imposing a superficial uniformity of style and approach. Throughout, the editors have kept the needs of the general audience firmly in mind during the editorial stages, and the aim has been a congruity of experience as a reader turns from book to book and from section to section of the finished volume.

## CONTENTS OF THE ANNOTATED BIBLE

The biblical text stands apart from any editorial contributions, in both placement and format. This will enable anyone who wishes to do so to read the text unprejudiced by editorial judgments.

The footnotes that are part of the New Revised Standard Version (indicated by an italic superscript letter after the word or phrase in question) are printed at the bottom of the right-hand column of the biblical text on each page where they occur. In these notes, divergent textual readings and alternate translations are printed in italics. Abbreviations in the textual notes are listed on pp. xxii–xxiii. The phrase "Other ancient authorities read" means that the reading (i.e., the wording) of the passage is different in various manuscripts and early versions, and the word "Or" signifies that the Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, or Latin text permits an alternate rendering besides the one given in the text. (See "Textual Criticism," p. 1843.)

Discussion of larger units in the Bible is provided by essays introducing each of them: "The Pentateuch," "The Historical Books," "The Poetical and Wisdom Books," "The Prophetic Books," "The Gospels," and "Letters/Epistles in the New Testament."

Each book is preceded by its own introduction, which sketches the book's structure, main themes, literary history, and historical context, as well as broad lines of interpretation; they therefore present a clear overview and guide to reading. These introductions are organized so that they cover the same topics in the same order.

At the bottom of each page of the biblical text, in a different font from it and in a single column, are the annotations. The annotations are just that, notes rather than paraphrase or commentary, although these genres admittedly overlap. They are intended to enhance the reader's understanding of the text, providing essential information, background, and interpretation, rather than only summarizing what it says. The boldface headings delineate the larger units of the book and provide a detailed consecutive outline of its contents. The word or phrase

being glossed is given in italics. Quotation marks are used for words quoted from elsewhere in the Bible as well as for transliterations of ancient languages. Since we desire each book to stand on its own, as much as possible the annotations are self-contained. We have thus tried to avoid both cross-references to fuller discussion elsewhere, and the misconception that a book or larger part of the Bible is merely a perfunctory reworking of other material, or that a particular passage can only be understood fully in the light of later biblical traditions. At the same time, we recognize that the Bible is often a progressive text, and that later parts of the Bible often contain the oldest interpretations of earlier traditions. The best starting point for interpreting a particular passage is often another passage, and we have encouraged contributors to point out interconnections in the biblical material by means of cross references. (The cross-references that end with “n.” refer to the annotation as well as to the biblical text.)

A listing of abbreviations for the books of the Bible used in this edition is found on p. xxi. The chapter and verse divisions in a reference are separated by a period; thus, Gen 3.8 refers to the book of Genesis, chapter 3, verse 8. Inclusive references are used for both chapters and verses; thus, Ex 1-15 refers to the first fifteen chapters of the book of Exodus; Rom 11.33-36 to verses 33 through 36 of chapter 11 of the letter to the Romans; and so forth. Partial verses—either separable clauses, individual sentences where two or more are part of the same verse, or lines of poetry—are referred to with lower-case letters; thus, Gen 2.4a means the first part (here, a sentence) of verse 4 in chapter 2 of the book of Genesis. When a book of the Bible is referred to within an annotation on that book, the name of the book is not repeated unless there is ambiguity.

In keeping with the general desire to take account of the diversity of the users of this study Bible, the editors have adopted two widely-accepted conventions: referring to the first portion of the text as “the Hebrew Bible,” since it is a collection preserved by the Jewish community and that is how Jews regard it; and citing all dates in the notes as BCE or CE (“Before the Common Era” and “Common Era”) instead of BC or AD (“Before Christ” and “Anno Domini” [“in the year of the Lord”]), which imply a Christian view of the status of Jesus of Nazareth. Use of the title “Old Testament” for those books here designated as “the Hebrew Bible” is confined to instances expressing the historical view of various Christian interpreters. These conventions are followed in the study materials that the editors have produced; the translation has its own conventions, which may not be altered.

Several dozen maps and plans are interspersed in the biblical text. These will assist readers to locate important places mentioned in the text or to clarify the prose descriptions of such structures as the Tabernacle and the Temple.

The study materials at the end of the volume are a series of interconnected essays that provide background information for understanding the Bible, the processes by which it was formed, the contexts in which it was produced, and the ways in which it has been interpreted through the ages. These essays are followed by tables of rulers, of weights and measures, of the calendar (with an explanatory essay), of parallel passages in the biblical traditions, and “Chapter and Verse Differences” between English and Hebrew texts. There is also a brief bibliography to English translations of ancient writings that are referred to in the notes. A select chronology provides a quick reference for major events, rulers, and other persons contemporaneous with the biblical accounts. The study materials also include a glossary of important terms and concepts.

At the end of the book is a comprehensive subject index to all of the study materials, including the annotations. Finally, there is a set of fourteen color maps, with a separate index to them, that constitute a brief historical atlas of the Bible.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It remains to express our gratitude, first and above all to the contributors, whose learning has made this a work of which we are immensely proud. We are grateful, as always, for the support and careful work of all those at Oxford University Press who make it possible to publish complex projects such as this. Lisa Grzan and Claudia Dukeshire oversaw the entire process of editorial development and typesetting, as well as the production of digital versions of this edition. Mary Sutherland copy-edited the entire text and prepared it for the compositor; Peachtree Editorial and Proofreading Service proofread the biblical text, and Debbie Ruel & Jan Maas proofread the study materials; 2K/DENMARK undertook the design and setting of the text. Erina Zadra oversaw the printing and binding process. Steve A. Wiggins and Donald Kraus handled all of the pre-production editing with unequalled skill and serenity. We are grateful to them all.

MICHAEL D. COOGAN, MARC Z. BRETTLER, CAROL A. NEWSOM, PHEME PERKINS — *August 2017*

# TO THE READER

[The following prefatory essay, "To the Reader," is part of the New Revised Standard Version Bible translation (NRSV), and is reprinted here in accordance with the requirements of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., which holds copyright to the NRSV.]

This preface is addressed to you by the Committee of translators, who wish to explain, as briefly as possible, the origin and character of our work. The publication of our revision is yet another step in the long, continual process of making the Bible available in the form of the English language that is most widely current in our day. To summarize in a single sentence: the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the Revised Standard Version, published in 1952, which was a revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which, in turn, embodied earlier revisions of the King James Version, published in 1611.

In the course of time, the King James Version came to be regarded as "the Authorized Version." With good reason it has been termed "the noblest monument of English prose," and it has entered, as no other book has, into the making of the personal character and the public institutions of the English-speaking peoples. We owe to it an incalculable debt.

Yet the King James Version has serious defects. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the development of biblical studies and the discovery of many biblical manuscripts more ancient than those on which the King James Version was based made it apparent that these defects were so many as to call for revision. The task was begun, by authority of the Church of England, in 1870. The (British) Revised Version of the Bible was published in 1881–1885; and the American Standard Version, its variant embodying the preferences of the American scholars associated with the work, was published, as was mentioned above, in 1901. In 1928 the copyright of the latter was acquired by the International Council of Religious Education and thus passed into the ownership of the Churches of the United States and Canada that were associated in this Council through their boards of education and publication.

The Council appointed a committee of scholars to have charge of the text of the American Standard Version and to undertake inquiry concerning the need for further revision. After studying the questions whether or not revision should be undertaken, and if so, what its nature and extent should be, in 1937 the Council authorized a revision. The scholars who served as members of the Committee worked in two sections, one dealing with the Old Testament and one with the New Testament. In 1946 the Revised Standard Version of the New Testament was published. The publication of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments, took place on September 30, 1952. A translation of the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books of the Old Testament followed in 1957. In 1977 this collection was issued in an expanded edition, containing three additional texts received by Eastern Orthodox communions (3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151). Thereafter the Revised Standard Version gained the distinction of being officially authorized for use by all major Christian churches: Protestant, Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox.

The Revised Standard Version Bible Committee is a continuing body, comprising about thirty members, both men and women. Ecumenical in representation, it includes scholars affiliated with various Protestant denominations, as well as several Roman Catholic members, an Eastern Orthodox member, and a Jewish member who serves in the Old Testament section. For a period of time the Committee included several members from Canada and from England.

Because no translation of the Bible is perfect or is acceptable to all groups of readers, and because discoveries of older manuscripts and further investigation of linguistic features of the text continue to become available, renderings of the Bible have proliferated. During the years following the publication of the Revised Standard Version, twenty-six other English translations and revisions of the Bible were produced by committees and by individual scholars—not to mention twenty-five other translations and revisions of the New Testament alone. One of the latter was the second edition of the RSV New Testament, issued in 1971, twenty-five years after its initial publication.

Following the publication of the RSV Old Testament in 1952, significant advances were made in the discovery and interpretation of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew. In addition to the information



that had become available in the late 1940s from the Dead Sea texts of Isaiah and Habakkuk, subsequent acquisitions from the same area brought to light many other early copies of all the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (except Esther), though most of these copies are fragmentary. During the same period early Greek manuscript copies of books of the New Testament also became available.

In order to take these discoveries into account, along with recent studies of documents in Semitic languages related to Hebrew, in 1974 the Policies Committee of the Revised Standard Version, which is a standing committee of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., authorized the preparation of a revision of the entire RSV Bible.

For the Old Testament the Committee has made use of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977; ed. sec. emendata, 1983). This is an edition of the Hebrew and Aramaic text as current early in the Christian era and fixed by Jewish scholars (the “Masoretes”) of the sixth to the ninth centuries. The vowel signs, which were added by the Masoretes, are accepted in the main, but where a more probable and convincing reading can be obtained by assuming different vowels, this has been done. No notes are given in such cases, because the vowel points are less ancient and reliable than the consonants. When an alternative reading given by the Masoretes is translated in a footnote, this is identified by the words “Another reading is.”

Departures from the consonantal text of the best manuscripts have been made only where it seems clear that errors in copying had been made before the text was standardized. Most of the corrections adopted are based on the ancient versions (translations into Greek, Aramaic, Syriac, and Latin), which were made prior to the time of the work of the Masoretes and which therefore may reflect earlier forms of the Hebrew text. In such instances a footnote specifies the version or versions from which the correction has been derived and also gives a translation of the Masoretic Text. Where it was deemed appropriate to do so, information is supplied in footnotes from subsidiary Jewish traditions concerning other textual readings (the *Tiqqune Sopherim*, “emendations of the scribes”). These are identified in the footnotes as “Ancient Heb tradition.”

Occasionally it is evident that the text has suffered in transmission and that none of the versions provides a satisfactory restoration. Here we can only follow the best judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text. Such reconstructions are indicated in footnotes by the abbreviation Cn (“Correction”), and a translation of the Masoretic Text is added.

For the New Testament the Committee has based its work on the most recent edition of *The Greek New Testament*, prepared by an interconfessional and international committee and published by the United Bible Societies (1966; 3rd ed. corrected, 1983; information concerning changes to be introduced into the critical apparatus of the forthcoming 4th edition was available to the Committee). As in that edition, double brackets are used to enclose a few passages that are generally regarded to be later additions to the text, but which we have retained because of their evident antiquity and their importance in the textual tradition. Only in very rare instances have we replaced the text or the punctuation of the Bible Societies’ edition by an alternative that seemed to us to be superior. Here and there in the footnotes the phrase, “Other ancient authorities read,” identifies alternative readings preserved by Greek manuscripts and early versions. In both Testaments, alternative renderings of the text are indicated by the word “Or.”

As for the style of English adopted for the present revision, among the mandates given to the Committee in 1980 by the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of Churches of Christ (which now holds the copyright of the RSV Bible) was the directive to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony, and current English usage. Within the constraints set by the original texts and by the mandates of the Division, the Committee has followed the maxim, “As literal as possible, as free as necessary.” As a consequence, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) remains essentially a literal translation. Paraphrastic renderings have been adopted only sparingly, and then chiefly to compensate for a deficiency in the English language—the lack of a common gender third person singular pronoun.

During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text. The mandates from the Division specified that, in references to men and women, masculine-oriented language should be eliminated as far as this can be done without altering passages that reflect the historical situation of ancient patriarchal culture. As can be appreciated, more than once the Committee found that the

several mandates stood in tension and even in conflict. The various concerns had to be balanced case by case in order to provide a faithful and acceptable rendering without using contrived English. Only very occasionally has the pronoun “he” or “him” been retained in passages where the reference may have been to a woman as well as to a man; for example, in several legal texts in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. In such instances of formal, legal language, the options of either putting the passage in the plural or of introducing additional nouns to avoid masculine pronouns in English seemed to the Committee to obscure the historic structure and literary character of the original. In the vast majority of cases, however, inclusiveness has been attained by simple rephrasing or by introducing plural forms when this does not distort the meaning of the passage. Of course, in narrative and in parable no attempt was made to generalize the sex of individual persons.

Another aspect of style will be detected by readers who compare the more stately English rendering of the Old Testament with the less formal rendering adopted for the New Testament. For example, the traditional distinction between *shall* and *will* in English has been retained in the Old Testament as appropriate in rendering a document that embodies what may be termed the classic form of Hebrew, while in the New Testament the abandonment of such distinctions in the usage of the future tense in English reflects the more colloquial nature of the koine Greek used by most New Testament authors except when they are quoting the Old Testament.

Careful readers will notice that here and there in the Old Testament the word LORD (or in certain cases God) is printed in capital letters. This represents the traditional manner in English versions of rendering the Divine Name, the “Tetragrammaton” (see the notes on Exodus 3.14, 15), following the precedent of the ancient Greek and Latin translators and the long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue. While it is almost if not quite certain that the Name was originally pronounced “Yahweh,” this pronunciation was not indicated when the Masoretes added vowel sounds to the consonantal Hebrew text. To the four consonants YHWH of the Name, which had come to be regarded as too sacred to be pronounced, they attached vowel signs indicating that in its place should be read the Hebrew word *Adonai* meaning “Lord” (or *Elohim* meaning “God”). Ancient Greek translators employed the word *Kyrios* (“Lord”) for the Name. The Vulgate likewise used the Latin word *Dominus* (“Lord”). The form “Jehovah” is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of the consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. Although the American Standard Version (1901) had used “Jehovah” to render the Tetragrammaton (the sound of Y being represented by J and the sound of W by V, as in Latin), for two reasons the Committees that produced the RSV and the NRSV returned to the more familiar usage of the King James Version. (1) The word “Jehovah” does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew. (2) The use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom the true God had to be distinguished, began to be discontinued in Judaism before the Christian era and is inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church.

It will be seen that in the Psalms and in other prayers addressed to God the archaic second person singular pronouns *thee*, *thou*, *thine*) and verb forms (*art*, *hast*, *hadst*) are no longer used. Although some readers may regret this change, it should be pointed out that in the original languages neither the Old Testament nor the New makes any linguistic distinction between addressing a human being and addressing the Deity. Furthermore, in the tradition of the King James Version one will not expect to find the use of capital letters for pronouns that refer to the Deity—such capitalization is an unnecessary innovation that has only recently been introduced into a few English translations of the Bible. Finally, we have left to the discretion of the licensed publishers such matters as section headings, cross-references, and clues to the pronunciation of proper names.

This new version seeks to preserve all that is best in the English Bible as it has been known and used through the years. It is intended for use in public reading and congregational worship, as well as in private study, instruction, and meditation. We have resisted the temptation to introduce terms and phrases that merely reflect current moods, and have tried to put the message of the Scriptures in simple, enduring words and expressions that are worthy to stand in the great tradition of the King James Bible and its predecessors.

In traditional Judaism and Christianity, the Bible has been more than a historical document to be preserved or a classic of literature to be cherished and admired; it is recognized as the unique record of God’s dealings with people over the ages. The Old Testament sets forth the call of a special people to enter into covenant relation with the God of justice and steadfast love and to bring God’s law to the nations. The New Testament records the life and work of Jesus Christ, the one in whom “the Word became flesh,” as well as describes the rise and spread of the early Christian Church. The Bible carries its full message, not to those who regard it simply as

a noble literary heritage of the past or who wish to use it to enhance political purposes and advance otherwise desirable goals, but to all persons and communities who read it so that they may discern and understand what God is saying to them. That message must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today. It is the hope and prayer of the translators that this version of the Bible may continue to hold a large place in congregational life and to speak to all readers, young and old alike, helping them to understand and believe and respond to its message.

For the Committee,  
BRUCE M. METZGER

# ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF THE BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

The Acts . . . . .	1557	James . . . . .	1767	Nehemiah . . . . .	693
Amos . . . . .	1299	Jeremiah . . . . .	1069	Numbers . . . . .	187
1 Chronicles . . . . .	583	Job . . . . .	729	Obadiah . . . . .	1315
2 Chronicles . . . . .	625	Joel . . . . .	1291	1 Peter . . . . .	1775
Colossians . . . . .	1707	John . . . . .	1519	2 Peter . . . . .	1783
1 Corinthians . . . . .	1637	1 John . . . . .	1789	Philemon . . . . .	1745
2 Corinthians . . . . .	1663	2 John . . . . .	1797	Philippians . . . . .	1701
Daniel . . . . .	1249	3 John . . . . .	1799	Proverbs . . . . .	905
Deuteronomy . . . . .	247	Jonah . . . . .	1319	Psalms . . . . .	781
Ecclesiastes . . . . .	945	Joshua . . . . .	315	Revelation . . . . .	1805
Ephesians . . . . .	1691	Jude . . . . .	1801	Romans . . . . .	1613
Esther . . . . .	715	Judges . . . . .	359	Ruth . . . . .	397
Exodus . . . . .	81	1 Kings . . . . .	493	1 Samuel . . . . .	405
Ezekiel . . . . .	1175	2 Kings . . . . .	539	2 Samuel . . . . .	453
Ezra . . . . .	675	Lamentations . . . . .	1163	Song of Solomon . . . . .	961
Galatians . . . . .	1679	Leviticus . . . . .	143	1 Thessalonians . . . . .	1715
Genesis . . . . .	7	Luke . . . . .	1467	2 Thessalonians . . . . .	1721
Habakkuk . . . . .	1341	Malachi . . . . .	1371	1 Timothy . . . . .	1727
Haggai . . . . .	1353	Mark . . . . .	1431	2 Timothy . . . . .	1735
Hebrews . . . . .	1749	Matthew . . . . .	1383	Titus . . . . .	1741
Hosea . . . . .	1275	Micah . . . . .	1325	Zechariah . . . . .	1357
Isaiah . . . . .	971	Nahum . . . . .	1335	Zephaniah . . . . .	1347



# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Books of the Bible: Abbreviation First

## HEBREW BIBLE

Gen . . . . .	Genesis	2 Chr . . . . .	2 Chronicles	Dan . . . . .	Daniel
Ex . . . . .	Exodus	Ezra . . . . .	Ezra	Hos . . . . .	Hosea
Lev . . . . .	Leviticus	Neh . . . . .	Nehemiah	Joel . . . . .	Joel
Num . . . . .	Numbers	Esth . . . . .	Esther	Am . . . . .	Amos
Deut . . . . .	Deuteronomy	Job . . . . .	Job	Ob . . . . .	Obadiah
Josh . . . . .	Joshua	Ps . . . . .	Psalms	Jon . . . . .	Jonah
Judg . . . . .	Judges	Prov . . . . .	Proverbs	Mic . . . . .	Micah
Ruth . . . . .	Ruth	Eccl . . . . .	Ecclesiastes	Nah . . . . .	Nahum
1 Sam . . . . .	1 Samuel	Song . . . . .	Song of Solomon	Hah . . . . .	Habakkuk
2 Sam . . . . .	2 Samuel	Isa . . . . .	Isaiah	Zeph . . . . .	Zephaniah
1 Kings . . . . .	1 Kings	Jer . . . . .	Jeremiah	Hag . . . . .	Haggai
2 Kings . . . . .	2 Kings	Lam . . . . .	Lamentations	Zech . . . . .	Zechariah
1 Chr . . . . .	1 Chronicles	Ezek . . . . .	Ezekiel	Mal . . . . .	Malachi

## NEW TESTAMENT

Mt . . . . .	Matthew	Eph . . . . .	Ephesians	Heb . . . . .	Hebrews
Mk . . . . .	Mark	Phil . . . . .	Philippians	Jas . . . . .	James
Lk . . . . .	Luke	Col . . . . .	Colossians	1 Pet . . . . .	1 Peter
Jn . . . . .	John	1 Thess . . . . .	1 Thessalonians	2 Pet . . . . .	2 Peter
Acts . . . . .	Acts of the Apostles	2 Thess . . . . .	2 Thessalonians	1 Jn . . . . .	1 John
Rom . . . . .	Romans	1 Tim . . . . .	1 Timothy	2 Jn . . . . .	2 John
1 Cor . . . . .	1 Corinthians	2 Tim . . . . .	2 Timothy	3 Jn . . . . .	3 John
2 Cor . . . . .	2 Corinthians	Titus . . . . .	Titus	Jude . . . . .	Jude
Gal . . . . .	Galatians	Philem . . . . .	Philemon	Rev . . . . .	Revelation

In the textual notes to the books of the Bible, the following abbreviations are used:

Ant.	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
Aram	Aramaic
Ch, chs	Chapter, chapters
Cn	Correction; made where the text has suffered in transmission and the versions provide no satisfactory restoration but where the Standard Bible Committee agrees with the judgment of competent scholars as to the most probable reconstruction of the original text.
Gk	Septuagint, Greek version of the Old Testament [also used in the NT, where it means simply Greek]
Heb	Hebrew of the consonantal Masoretic Text of the Old Testament
Josephus	Flavius Josephus (Jewish historian, about 37 to 95 CE)
Macc.	The book(s) of the Maccabees
Ms(s)	Manuscript(s)
MT	The Hebrew of the pointed Masoretic Text of the Old Testament
OL	Old Latin
Q Ms(s)	Manuscript(s) found at Qumran by the Dead Sea
Sam	Samaritan Hebrew text of the Old Testament
Syr	Syriac Version of the Old Testament
Syr H	Syriac Version of Origen's Hexapla
Tg	Targum
Vg	Vulgate, Latin Version of the Old Testament

For a detailed discussion of these terms, see "Textual Criticism," p. 1843.

The following abbreviations of additional ancient works are used in the introductions and annotations to the biblical books, and in the General Essays at the end of the volume:

Ag. Ap.	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>	1 Clem	1 Clement (First Epistle of Clement)
ANET	Pritchard, <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts</i>	CoS	<i>The Context of Scripture: Canonical Compositions, Monumental Inscriptions, and Archival Documents from the Ancient World</i> , 3 vols. (ed. W.W. Hallo; Leiden: Brill, 1997–2002)
Apoc. Bar.	<i>Apocalypse of Baruch</i>		
Apoc. Zeph.	<i>Apocalypse of Zephaniah</i>		
Aristophanes, <i>Ran.</i>	Aristophanes, <i>Ranae (Frogs)</i>		
Aristotle, <i>Pol.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Politics</i>		
Aristotle, <i>Rh.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Rhetoric</i>		
Aristotle, <i>Virt.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Virtues and Vices</i>	De Vir. Ill.	Jerome, <i>De viris Illustribus</i> , "Of Illustrious Men"
2 Bar.	2 <i>Baruch</i> (another name for the <i>Apocalypse of Baruch</i> )	Did.	<i>Didache</i>
b. B. Bat.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Baba Bathra</i>	Dio Chrys., Or.	Dio Chrysostom, <i>Orationes</i>
b. Ber.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Berakot</i>	Diod. Sic.	Diodorus of Sicily ( <i>Library of History</i> )
b. Eruv.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Eruvim</i>	1 En.	1 <i>Enoch</i>
b. Git.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Gittin</i>	Ep. Arist.	<i>Letter of Aristeas</i>
b. Meg.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Megillah</i>	Euripides, Tro.	Euripides, <i>Trojan Women</i>
b. Ned.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Nedarim</i>	Eusebius, <i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
b. San.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Sanhedrin</i>	Eusebius, <i>Praep. Ev.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Praeparatio Evangelica</i>
b. Shabb.	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Shabbat</i>	Gen. Rab.	<i>Genesis Rabbah</i>
b. Yoma	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate <i>Yoma</i>	Gk	Greek
CD	Cairo Genizah, Damascus Document	Hermas, Mand.	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate</i>
Cicero, <i>Fin.</i>	Cicero, <i>De finibus</i>	Hermas, Sim.	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Similitude</i>
		Hist.	Herodotus, <i>Histories</i>
		Homer, Od.	Homer, <i>Odyssey</i>
		HS	Holiness School

Ignatius, <i>Philad.</i>	Ignatius, <i>Epistle to the Philadelphians</i>	Pliny, <i>Nat. Hist.</i>	Pliny, <i>Naturalis Historia</i>
Irenaeus, <i>Adv. Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus omnes Haereses</i>	Plutarch, <i>Mor.</i>	Plutarch, <i>Moralia</i>
J <sup>B</sup>	Jerusalem Bible	<i>Pro Rabirio</i>	Cicero, <i>Pro Rabirio Postuma</i>
Jer. Sot.	Jerusalem Talmud, <i>Sotah</i> (see <i>y. Sot.</i> )	<i>Pss. Sol.</i>	<i>Psalms of Solomon</i>
Josephus, <i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish Antiquities</i>	11Q <sup>Temple</sup>	The Temple Scroll from Qumran
Josephus, <i>Ap.</i>	Josephus, <i>Against Apion</i>		Cave 11 (11Q19)
Josephus, <i>J.W.</i>	Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>	1QH	Hodayot (Thanksgiving Hymns)
<i>Jub.</i>	<i>Jubilees</i>		from Qumran Cave 1
Juvenal, <i>Sat.</i>	Juvenal, <i>Satires</i>	1QM	Milhamah (War Scroll) from
KJV	King James Version (1611)		Qumran Cave 1
l	liter	11Q <sup>Melch</sup>	Melchizedek Scroll from Qumran
<i>Lam. Rab.</i>	<i>Lamentations Rabbah</i>		Cave 11 (11Q13)
lit.	literally	1Qp <sup>Hab</sup>	Peshet to Habakkuk from Qumran
LXX	the Septuagint		Cave 1
<i>m. Abot</i>	<i>Mishnah Abot</i>	11Q <sup>Ps</sup> <sup>a</sup>	The Psalms <sup>a</sup> Scroll from Qumran
<i>m. Avoda Zara</i>	<i>Mishnah Avoda Zara</i>		Cave 11 (11Q5)
<i>m. Ber.</i>	<i>Mishnah Berakot</i>	1QS	Rule of the Community (Serek
<i>m. Ketub.</i>	<i>Mishnah Ketubim</i>		Hayahad) from Qumran Cave 1
<i>m. Ned.</i>	<i>Mishnah Nedarim</i>	Quintilian, <i>Inst.</i>	<i>Institutio Oratoria</i>
<i>m. Ohalot</i>	<i>Mishnah Ohalot</i>	<i>Quod Det.</i>	Philo, <i>Quod Deterius Potiori Insidiari</i>
<i>m. Sukkah</i>	<i>Mishnah Tractate Sukkah</i> , “Taber- nacles, Booths” [harvest festival]		<i>Soleat</i> , “That the Worse is Wont to Attack the Better”
<i>Midr.</i>	<i>Midrash</i>	REB	REVISED ENGLISH BIBLE
<i>Midr. Pss.</i>	<i>Midrash Psalms</i>	RSV	REVISED STANDARD VERSION
<i>Midr. Rab.</i>	<i>Midrash Rabbah</i>	<i>Seder Eliyahu R.</i>	<i>Seder Eliyahu Rabbah</i> , midrash [on the coming-to-be of the world]
<i>m. Shabb.</i>	<i>Misnah Shabbat</i>		
<i>m. Sot.</i>	<i>Mishnah Sotah</i>	<i>Seder Olam R.</i>	<i>Seder Olam Rabbah</i>
<i>Nic. Eth.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>	<i>Shab.</i>	<i>Shabbat</i>
NIV	New International Version	<i>Sifre Num.</i>	<i>Sifre Numbers</i>
NT	New Testament	<i>Sib. Or.</i>	<i>Sibylline Oracles</i>
OG	Old Greek [Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible], the Septuagint (LXX)	Sophocles, <i>Ant.</i>	Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i>
<i>P. Oxy.</i>	<i>Oxyrhynchus Papyri</i>	<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
Philo, <i>De Conf. Ling.</i>	Philo, <i>De Confusione Linguarum</i>	Tacitus, <i>Hist.</i>	Tacitus, <i>Historiae</i>
Philo, <i>De spec. leg.</i>	Philo, <i>De specialibus Legibus</i>	<i>T. Abr.</i>	<i>Testament of Abraham</i>
Philo, <i>Flaccus</i>	Philo, <i>Against Flaccus</i>	<i>T. Jos.</i>	<i>Testament of Joseph</i>
Philo, <i>Her.</i>	Philo, <i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit</i>	<i>T. Jud. (Test. Jud.)</i>	<i>Testament of Judah</i>
Philo, <i>Leg. all.</i>	Philo, <i>Legum allegoriae</i>	<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
Philo, <i>Leg. Gai.</i>	Philo, <i>Legatio ad Gaium</i>	<i>T. Moses</i>	<i>Testament of Moses</i>
Philo, <i>Migr.</i>	Philo, <i>De migratione Abrahami</i>	<i>T. Naph.</i>	<i>Testament of Naphtali</i>
Philo, <i>Opif.</i>	Philo, <i>De opificio mundi</i>	<i>T. Reuben</i>	<i>Testament of Reuben</i>
Philo, <i>Quest. in Gen.</i>	Philo, <i>Quaestiones in Genesis</i>	<i>T. Sol.</i>	<i>Testament of Solomon</i>
Plato, <i>Cri.</i>	Plato, <i>Crito</i>	<i>Tg. Ps.-J.</i>	<i>Targum Pseudo-Jonathan</i>
Plato, <i>Gorg.</i>	Plato, <i>Gorgias</i>	<i>Tr. Eruv.</i>	Babylonian Talmud, <i>Tractate Eruvim</i>
Plato, <i>Phaedr.</i>	Plato, <i>Phaedrus</i>	<i>y.</i>	(see <i>b. Eruv.</i> )
Plato, <i>Symp.</i>	Plato, <i>Symposium</i>	<i>y. Sot.</i>	Jerusalem Talmud
		v., vv.	Jerusalem Talmud, <i>Sotah</i> verse, verses

*Note:* The abbreviation “Q,” unless specified as “Quelle” (“Source”) for the posited New Testament document of non-Markan common material in Matthew and Luke, refers to Qumran, and manuscripts from Qumran are identified by the cave number, which precedes the Q, and the official manuscript number, which follows it; thus, 1Q34 = Manuscript 34 from Cave 1 at Qumran; 4Q174 = Manuscript 174 from Cave 4; etc.





# **THE NEW OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE**

Fully Revised  
Fifth Edition

New Revised Standard Version



# **THE HEBREW BIBLE**

The Hebrew Scriptures  
Commonly Called  
The Old Testament

New Revised Standard Version



# INTRODUCTION TO THE PENTATEUCH

## TERMINOLOGY, CONTENTS, AND TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF AUTHORSHIP

The word “Pentateuch,” from the Greek for “five (*penta*) books (*teuchos*),” has entered English by way of Latin as the designation for the first group of books in the Bible, comprising Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Unlike other canonical divisions, where there is significant debate within and between different religious traditions, all Jewish and Christian traditions view these five books in this order as a single unit opening the Bible. The unanimity of tradition and the initial placement of these five books reflect their significance within both Judaism and Christianity.

These five books present a narrative beginning with the creation of the world and concluding immediately before the entrance of Israel into the land of Canaan. They do not, however, form a single book in the modern sense, with a single author; modern scholarship has persuasively argued that each of these books is composite, consisting of several sources and supplements from different periods in Israel’s history (see below). Nor do the five form a single book in terms of plot. Although Moses is the central human character of much of the Pentateuch, he is not introduced until ch 2 of Exodus, the second book. Nor is the early development of Israel as a people the Pentateuch’s unifying theme, as the first eleven chapters of the Bible are concerned with the world from creation to the birth of Abraham (Gen 11.27). Other suggested unifying themes for the Pentateuch, such as covenant, are also inadequate, since they do not explicitly appear at the beginning of the Pentateuch and also continue well beyond it. The suggestion that the promise of the land unifies the Pentateuch is especially problematic, since this theme, though introduced in Gen 12, is fulfilled only with the conquest of the land in the book of Joshua, in which case the Hexateuch (“six books”: the Pentateuch plus Joshua) rather than the Pentateuch should be seen as the decisive unit. In fact, the story begun in the Hexateuch continues in Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings, leading some scholars to posit an Enneateuch, or nine-book unit starting with Genesis.

The Hebrew terms *torah*, *torat moshe* (“the Torah of Moses”), *torat YHWH* (“the Torah of the Lord”), and *torat ha’elohim* (“the Torah of God”), already in use in late biblical literature to describe what is later called the Pentateuch (e.g., 2 Chr 23.18; Ezra 7.6,10; Neh 8.1,18; Dan 9.11), offer a better clue to the nature and unity of these books. *Torah* is often understood as “law,” and this is one of its frequent meanings in the Bible, as in Ex 12.49: “There shall be one law [Heb “*torah*”] for the native and for the alien who resides among you.” This understanding is already found in the Septuagint, the pre-Common Era translation of the Bible into Greek, where *torah* is typically translated as *nomos*, “law.” Law is a predominant genre of the Pentateuch, which contains extensive legal collections in Ex 21–23, Lev 17–26, and Deut 12–26, as well as selected laws within various narratives, such as the law of circumcision in the narrative about Abraham in Gen 17 and the law concerning inheritance of the land by women in Num 36, embedded within a section about the possession of the land. Many narrative sections also contain material that is of legal significance. For example, the first creation account in Genesis culminates with the “creation” of the sabbath (Gen 2.2–3), anticipating the legislation of Ex 16, and of the Decalogue, in Ex 20.8–11. Similarly, the account of the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25–40), a temporary temple for God in the wilderness, is not narrated for its own sake, but as an introduction to the various laws of sacrifice, narrated at the beginning of Leviticus, the book that immediately follows.

Yet “law” is not the only possible translation of *torah*, and the Pentateuch is not a book of law. *Torah* also means “instruction” or “teaching,” as in Prov 1.8: “Hear, my child, your father’s instruction, and do not reject your mother’s teaching (*torah*).” Teaching is not confined to law; narratives or stories are as effective a medium of instruction. Thus, given the predominance of narrative in significant portions of the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, the beginning of Exodus, and Numbers, it is best to understand the biblical term *torat moshe* as “the instruction of Moses,” an instruction realized through narratives and laws, which together elucidate the proper norms of living and the relationship between God and the world.

The term *torat moshe* and its variants, in several late biblical books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, and Chronicles, refers to the Pentateuch more or less as it now exists, but it is not found in the Pentateuch. In fact, the Torah

never explicitly suggests that it was compiled by Moses himself. (The phrase “the Torah” in passages such as Deut 4.44, “This is the law [*torah*] that Moses set before the Israelites,” never refers to the complete Pentateuch.) The tradition that Moses wrote the entire Torah is likely based on the passages that suggest that Moses stayed on Mount Sinai (or Horeb) for forty days and forty nights (Ex 24.18; 34.28; Deut 9.9; 10.10). Clearly, this was too long a time for short legal collections such as Ex 21–23 to have been conveyed to him, and thus traditions developed that Moses received the entire written Torah from God at that point. According to the classical rabbis, Moses simultaneously received the oral law, which interpreted and filled in the written law. The written Torah would include, according to all rabbinic sources (which are followed by the early church), even the book of Genesis, which represents God’s narration to Moses of the early history of the world and of Abraham and his extended family. Some rabbinic sources even suggest that the final chapter of the Torah, Deut 34, which beginning in v. 5 narrates the death of Moses, was dictated by God to Moses, who wrote it with his tears. The view that the Torah should be understood as the divine word mediated by Moses was the standard view of synagogue and church through the Renaissance.

This view is explicitly contradicted by the Torah’s narrative, as was sometimes (though rarely) recognized in the Middle Ages. Thus, Abraham ibn Ezra, a scholar active in the twelfth century CE, noted that Gen 12.6 states in reference to Abraham that “at that time the Canaanites were in the land.” The words “at that time” suggest that for the author, the Canaanites were no longer in the land; in other words, it appears that this snippet was written after the time of Moses, because during his time the Canaanites were still in the land. Several other places that indicate authorship later than Moses were pointed out by a small number of medieval scholars, but this view was never systematized into a thesis that could challenge the dominant view concerning Moses’s authorship of the Torah.

#### MODERN SOURCE THEORIES

Slowly, with the rise of rationalism, particularly as associated with figures such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) and Benedict (Baruch) Spinoza (1632–1677), the view that the Torah was a unified whole, written by Moses, began to be questioned. (For additional information on this development, see the essays on “The Interpretation of the Bible,” pp. 1856–1882.) This culminated in the development of the Documentary Hypothesis in the nineteenth century, according to which the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch) is composed of four main sources or documents that were edited or redacted together: J, E, P, and D. Each of these sources or documents is embedded in a (relatively) complete form in the current Pentateuch, and each has a distinct vocabulary and theological perspective.

J and E are so called after the names for God that each of them uses in Genesis: J uses the name “Yahweh” (German *Jahwe*, hence “J”), translated in the NRSV as “LORD,” though it is really a personal name, whose exact meaning is unknown, from the root “to be”; E prefers to call the deity “Elohim” (translated “God”), an epithet that also serves as the generic term for God or gods in the Bible; P, which also uses “Elohim” (among other names, such as *el shaddai* [NRSV “God Almighty”], but not “LORD”) is an abbreviation for the Priestly material; and D refers to Deuteronomy.

The difference in divine names, however, is not the main criterion used by scholars for suggesting that the Torah is not a unified composition. Much more significant are doublets and contradictions, in both narrative and legal material. For example, it has long been noted that chs 1–3 of Genesis twice narrate creation. People are created first in 1.27—“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”—and then again in 2.7—“Then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.” Furthermore, the second creation account does not simply mirror or repeat the first, but differs from the first both in outline and in detail. Gen 1.1–2.3, the first account, narrates the creation of a highly symmetrical world by a very powerful deity who creates by speaking. In this account, for example, man and woman are created together (1.27) after the creation of the land animals (1.25). In contrast, the second account, in Gen 2.4–3.24, suggests that man was created (2.7), then the animals (2.19), and then woman (2.21–22). Its focus is on the creation of humanity, not of the entire physical world, and God experiments and anthropomorphically “forms” various beings, rather than creating them by speaking. Thus, these are two distinct accounts, written by two authors, expressing different worldviews about the nature of creation, humanity, and God.

The two creation accounts appear as two totally separate blocks of material in Gen 1.1–2.4a and 2.4b–3.24. In several cases, however, an editor or redactor could not combine sources into consecutive, complete blocks.

For example, the flood story culminates in a tradition that God will never again bring a flood on the land (Gen 9.11); for this reason, the J and P flood narratives cannot appear as separate and complete narratives, so they are intertwined. Similarly, the story of the plague of blood (Ex 7.14–24) contains two intertwined accounts; in one (J), Moses is the protagonist, and the blood affects only the Nile, and the main plague is death of fish (e.g., vv. 17–18), while in the other (P), Aaron appears as well, and blood affects all Egyptian water sources (e.g., vv. 19, 24). In such cases, careful attention to plot and vocabulary helps to discern the original building blocks or sources of the story. This is sometimes easier in the original Hebrew since many translations, in their desire to create a text that reads well, obscure differences between sources.

In addition to narrative, the legal material in the Torah is not unified. For example, slave laws concerning Hebrew or Israelite slaves are found in Ex 21.1–6, Lev 25.39–46, and Deut 15.12–18. These laws cannot be reconciled in a straightforward fashion since three different notions of slavery underlie them. Most significant is the way in which Exodus differentiates between the treatment of male and female slaves, whereas Deuteronomy claims that they should both be treated similarly. While Exodus and Deuteronomy agree that a slave who loves his master may opt to remain a slave “for life” (Ex 21.6) or “forever” (Deut 15.17), Lev 25 insists that slavery does not really exist, since slaves must be treated “as hired or bound laborers,” and they may serve only “until the year of the jubilee” (v. 40). Such legal differences are not surprising given that the Bible is composite and that the different legal collections reflect norms or ideals of different groups living in different times or locations.

In fact, it is possible to trace distinctive styles and theological notions that typify individual Pentateuchal sources. For example, the J source is well known for its highly anthropomorphic God, who has a close relationship with humans, as seen in Gen 2.4–3.24, which includes, for example, a description of the LORD God “walking in the garden” (3.8) and says that the LORD God “made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them” (3.21). On the other hand, in E, the Elohist source, God is more distant from people, typically communicating with them by dreams or through intermediaries, such as heavenly messengers (NRSV “angels”) and prophets. The P or Priestly source is characterized by a strong interest in order and boundaries (see Gen 1), as well as an overriding concern with the priestly family of Aaron that supervises the Temple-based religious system, which is prefigured by worship at the tabernacle in the wilderness. D, or Deuteronomy, is characterized by a unique hortatory or preaching style and insists strongly that God cannot be seen, as in this source’s description of revelation: “Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice” (Deut 4.12). This explains why this source, uniquely, insists that God does not physically dwell in the Temple or tabernacle; rather, the Temple is “the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (Deut 12.11). D further emphasizes that this one God must be worshiped in one place only (see especially Deut 12); this place is later understood to be Jerusalem. Deuteronomy also shows exceptional concern for the underclasses, such as the widow and orphan, and it focuses on Moses.

The narrative sources J, E, P, and D also have legal collections associated with them. The Covenant Collection or Covenant Code (see Ex 24.7) in Ex 20.22–23.33 is probably associated with E. The Holiness Collection or Holiness Code of Lev 17–26 is so named because of its central injunction, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19.2). Though not composed by the Priestly author (P), it represents a form of Priestly theology. The Deuteronomic law collection appears in Deut 12–26. These blocks of material are often called “codes,” but since the blocks are neither complete nor organized for the law court, as a “code” might be, the term “collection” is more suitable.

Critical biblical scholarship, through the latter part of the twentieth century, was confident in dating each of these Pentateuchal sources along with the legal collections they incorporated. Thus, J was seen as the earliest collection, often dated to the period of David and Solomon in the tenth century BCE, followed by E, which was often associated with the Northern Kingdom of Israel, established after the death of Solomon. D was connected to the reform of King Josiah of Judah in the late seventh century, and P was seen as deriving from the Babylonian exile in the sixth century. Scholars now agree that the reasons usually given for assigning these dates are problematic, and some doubt many of the historical events associated with them, such as the Davidic monarchy or the Josianic reform. A lively debate has developed concerning the relative order and absolute date of these sources. The existence of E as a complete source has been questioned as well, especially since E first appears well after the beginning of the Torah and is very difficult to disentangle from J after the beginning of Exodus. Thus, many scholars now talk of JE together as an early narrative source, incorporating diverse traditions; this should be distinguished from P, Priestly material, and D, Deuteronomic material, which according to



some is also found outside of Deuteronomy, in the Torah's first four books. Other scholars have abandoned a documentary model, which sees the Torah as comprised of four distinct, largely complete blocks (J, E, D and P), and have returned to a model that was more popular in the nineteenth century—a supplementary model—where the Torah grew over a long period of time as a result of a large number of supplements to a base text. Others combine documentary and supplementary approaches. Given that ancient texts remained flexible over a long period of time, such complex models are very likely.

Most scholars who continue to work with a documentary model no longer see each source as the work of a single author writing at one particular time but recognize that each is the product of a single group or “school” over a long time. Thus, it is best to speak of streams or strands of tradition and to contrast their basic underpinnings, rather than to speak of a source coming from a single author, period, and locale. Yet, despite the unraveling of a consensus on the exact date and nature of the sources, it is still important to acknowledge the many contradictory perspectives found in the Torah, and to contrast the ideologies and worldviews of different passages, contrasting, for example, the Deuteronomic view of Israel's fundamental, intrinsic holiness—as seen, in Deut 7.6, “For you are a people holy to the LORD your God”—with the Priestly view, articulated most clearly in the Holiness Collection, which suggests that Israel must aspire to holiness—as in Lev 19.2, “You shall be holy.”

#### COMPILATION AND REDACTION OF THE PENTATEUCH

It is unknown how these various sources and legal collections, which now comprise the Torah, came together to form a single book. Some scholars posited that the Torah was compiled by Ezra on the basis of a request by the Persian authorities—this is called “the royal authorization hypothesis”—but this goes beyond the evidence available. Most scholars posit an editor or series of editors or redactors, conventionally called R, who combined the various sources, perhaps in several stages, over a long time. Not all ancient Israelite legal and narrative traditions were collected and redacted as part of the Torah. The Torah itself occasionally indicates when it refers to other sources (e.g., Num 21.14,27), and traditions about creation and the early history of Israel that are not found in the Torah are found in biblical books outside of the Torah (e.g., Isa 51.9). Much material was certainly lost. Without direct access to these lost texts and traditions, it is impossible to suggest in detail how and why the redactor(s), R, functioned in a particular way. It is sufficient to notice that in contrast to modern editing, which is typically interested in developing a single viewpoint, the redaction of the Torah, like the editing of other ancient works, was not interested in creating a purely consistent, singular perspective but incorporated a variety of voices and perspectives and wished to preserve them despite their repetitions and contradictions. This is part of the process of the formation of authoritative scripture.

The ultimate result of this redaction, which most likely took place during the Babylonian exile (586–538 BCE) or soon thereafter in the early Persian period, was the creation of a very long book, narrating what was thought to be the formative period of Israel, from the period of the creation of the world through the death of Moses. Perhaps the events narrated in Gen 1–11 were included as a type of introduction to the choosing of Abraham, describing in detail the failures of humanity, as seen especially in the flood narrative (Gen 6–9) and the tower of Babel episode (Gen 11.1–9), which necessitated the choosing of a particular nation—Israel—by God.

No other work of comparable length or inclusiveness, in terms of the time span covered and the sources systematically incorporated, was produced in the ancient Near East. This extensive, inclusive nature of the Torah has created a fundamental and interesting problem with which biblical interpreters have either consciously or subconsciously grappled: Do we concentrate on interpreting the individual sources, on hearing the voices of the constituent parts of the text before redaction took place? Or do we focus on the final product, an approach that has been called holistic reading? The annotations of the following books will draw attention to this issue, showing how meaning may be uncovered by looking both at the early building blocks of the text and at the text in its final, redacted form.

*Marc Z. Brettler*

# GENESIS

## NAME

Jewish tradition calls the first book of the Bible after its first 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 Mesopotamian epic that narrates the world’s 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 ancient Greek translation of the Torah, the Septuagint. *Genesis* in Greek means “origin” or “birth,” and it appears throughout the Greek translation of book, starting with two labels that refer to a “book of origin/birth” (2.4; 5.1). 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

Every ordering of the Bible places Genesis 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, Ishmael, and Isaac, 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

In the ancient Near East, most literary compositions, including Genesis, 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 author attributions were important and the writings attributed to 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 Torah/Pentateuch to Moses.

Nevertheless, careful readers of the Bible in subsequent centuries recognized 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’s authorship of the entire 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 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 and 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 or later. 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 earlier had 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 group of priestly 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 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 at the tabernacle. 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 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 contradictions 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 non-Priestly 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 more than three hundred years ago, and the specifics of this distinction of P and non-P throughout the Pentateuch have 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. The book’s history of composition explains why 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

Genesis is comprised of two main sections: the primeval history in chs 1:1–11:26 and the ancestral history in chs 11:27–50:26. The latter section contains the story of Abraham and Sarah (chs 11.27–25.11), the story of Jacob and Esau (chs 25.19–35.29), and the story of Joseph and his brothers (chs 37.2–50.26). (Isaac, son of Abraham and father of Jacob, is a linking figure and is not the subject of an extensive story of his own.) 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. These two sections are followed by a genealogy in 11.10–26 that traces the generations connecting Noah’s son, Shem, to Abraham.

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, the depiction of the clever deceptions of Jacob and others (e.g., 25.27–34; 27.1–45) often parallel 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 then 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	6.5–11.9
II. Transitional genealogy bridging from Shem (the Primeval History) to Abraham (Ancestral History)	11.10–26
III. 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 has settled in Egypt because of famine in their homeland, but the final set of sons of Jacob have remained together (in contrast to Isaac-Ishmael and Jacob-Esau) and are common 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 together 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 became 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, including the books of Chronicles, Ezra, Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon. 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, the book

of Jubilees (written in the second century BCE) uses regulations for impurity after birth (Lev 12.1–5) to calculate a period of forty days of impurity for Adam’s creation and an additional eighty days for Eve’s creation (Jubilees 3:8–12). Moreover, the story of Abraham’s near-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—reflecting hopes for redemption in times of suffering.

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 Gentile converts 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 Qur’an 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 as literal truth, 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 should not be 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, without recourse to its compositional history, 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 and other 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.

Many who have resolved to read the whole Bible 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 biblical ancestors as 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, which adopt techniques from the 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. Its 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, the brothers' 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 (37.18–28). 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 Sarah's endangerment at the hands of her husband and foreign rulers (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<sup>a</sup> the heavens and the earth,<sup>2</sup> the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God<sup>b</sup> swept over the face of the waters.<sup>3</sup> Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.<sup>4</sup> And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.<sup>5</sup> God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there

<sup>a</sup> Or *when God began to create* or *In the beginning God created*

<sup>b</sup> 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, even a title 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). **2:** Like Gen 2.4–6 and other ancient cosmogonies, Gen 1.2 begins with description of how things were before creation. The initial focus on earth as an uninhabitable mass (submerged in water, see 1.9) sets the stage for God's transformation of it into a livable habitat on days two and three. Christian interpreters have often seen the “Spirit” of the Trinity later in this verse. *Wind of God* fits the ancient context better (see 8.1), describing a divine breath that prepares for God's creation speech that follows next. **3:** The first of eight acts of creation through decree. Like a 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

was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup> And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.”<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup> 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,<sup>15</sup> and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so.<sup>16</sup> God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars.<sup>17</sup> God set them in the

dome of the sky to give light upon the earth,<sup>18</sup> to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.<sup>19</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”<sup>23</sup> And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make human-kind<sup>a</sup> in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of

<sup>a</sup> Heb *adam*

scheme of 1.1–2.3 requires the creation of light, day, and night at the outset. 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, creating a space in which subsequent creation can take place. 11–13: *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: The correspondence between days one to three and days four to six (1 || 4, 2 || 5, 3 || 6) 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. Their “rule” of day and night (1.16) anticipate human rule of earth in 1.26, 28. 20–23: 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). 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 1.11–13n.). The text does not mention God giving a fertility blessing to land animals (cf. 1.22), perhaps because their multiplication might jeopardize human rule over the earth they share with humans (1.26, 28). 26: The plural *us, our* (3.22; 11.7) probably refers to the divine beings who compose God’s heavenly



the earth,<sup>a</sup> and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind<sup>b</sup> in his image, in the image of God he created them;<sup>c</sup> male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> 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.”

<sup>29</sup> 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. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

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

<sup>4</sup> These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD<sup>d</sup> God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup> 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

<sup>a</sup> Syr: Heb *and over all the earth*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *adam*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *him*

<sup>d</sup> Heb YHWH, as in other places where “LORD” is spelled with capital letters (see also Ex 3.14-15 with notes).

court (1 Kings 22.19; Job 1.6). 26–27: *Image, likeness* is often interpreted to be a spiritual likeness between God and humanity. This idea of God’s making of humans as a “God image” (1.27) may instead be related to ancient ideas of the making of physical cult images of deities and/or ancient beliefs that the king was an “image” of the deity, and thus authorized to rule. This latter idea is democratized here. God makes all of humanity as images of God in order for them to exercise godlike rule over earth’s creatures. 27–28: The text stresses the creation of humanity as simultaneously male and female. This prepares for God’s fertility blessing in v. 28, enabling humans to multiply greatly on the earth and thus “subdue” it and its creatures. Developed in a context quite different from the present day, this picture accurately anticipated the power of contemporary humanity over much of the rest of its habitat. 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: God’s seventh-day rest (Heb “shabat”) here weaves a seven-day rhythm into creation, anticipating later commands for Israel to rest on the seventh day (e.g. Ex 16.22–30; 20:8–11//Deut 5.12–15).

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)	
Eating of fruit transgression/maturing (2.4–3.21)	<i>Brother conflict</i> divine defiance, murder (4.1–16)
Prevention of godlike immortality (3.22–24)	Origins of cultures, accelerated violence (4.17–24)
Flood: un-creation and re-creation (6.5–9.17)	
Origins/spreading of <b>peoples</b> (10.1–11.9) and divine prevention of people gaining godlike power (11.1–9)	<i>Brother separation</i> : subjugation of a <b>people</b> (9.20–27) as a result of the <b>first drinking of wine</b>

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



there was no one to till the ground;<sup>6</sup> but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—<sup>7</sup> then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,<sup>a</sup> and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.<sup>8</sup> And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed.<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches.<sup>11</sup> The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;<sup>12</sup> and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.<sup>13</sup> The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush.<sup>14</sup> The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.<sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden;<sup>17</sup> 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.”

<sup>18</sup> Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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<sup>b</sup> there was not found a helper as his partner.<sup>21</sup> So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his

<sup>a</sup> Or *formed a man* (Heb *adam*) of dust from the ground (Heb *adamah*)

<sup>b</sup> Or *for Adam*

in ancient Near Eastern creation stories. 7: The wordplay on Heb “*adam*” (human being; here translated “man” [cf. 1.26]) and “*adamah*” (arable land/soil; 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 God’s *breath* animates the *dust* and it becomes a single *living being* (Ps 104.29; Job 34.14–15). 8–9: *Eden* probably means “well-watered place.” Elsewhere in the Bible, this place is called “garden of God/the LORD” (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 temples. In addition, ancient Near Eastern art and texts feature a prominent focus on trees, often associated with feminine powers of fertility. The *tree of life* appears in Proverbs (3.22; Prov 3.18; 11.30; 13.12; 15.4). But this story focuses more on the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, symbolizing the mature knowledge of adults (Isa 7.15) and the godlike wisdom possessed by kings (2 Sam 14.17; 1 Kings 3.9). Despite the translation here (the tree of life also in the midst of the garden), the text may mean that both trees are located in the midst of the garden. 10–14: This section, along with the preceding one describing a “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 significant rivers like the *Tigris* and *Euphrates* (both in Mesopotamia) with the more obscure *Pishon* and *Gihon*. The latter may refer to the *Gihon* spring in Jerusalem (1 Kings 1.33, 38, 45) and the idea of a world river flowing from the temple mountain in Jerusalem (Ps 46.4; Zech 14.8). 15: God’s placement of the human in the garden to till it echoes other ancient creation narratives where humans are created to labor on the gods’ behalf. 16–17: God’s speech focuses on a prohibition for the human to eat from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil” lest he “certainly die” (NRSV you shall die). 18: God’s decision to create a helper for the human that “corresponds to him” (NRSV as his partner) recognizes a primal human need for companionship and the human destiny, even in the garden, to work (see 2.15; Eccl 4.7–10); the Hebrew word rendered as helper need not imply a subordinate status. 19–20: 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 truly corresponding *helper* for the human. 21–23: Just as the connection of humanity to the ground is af-

ribs and closed up its place with flesh.<sup>22</sup> And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.<sup>23</sup> Then the man said,

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

this one shall be called Woman,<sup>a</sup>

for out of Man<sup>b</sup> this one was taken.”

<sup>24</sup> Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.<sup>25</sup> 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?’”<sup>2</sup> The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;<sup>3</sup> 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.’”<sup>4</sup> But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die;<sup>5</sup> for God knows that when you eat of it

your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,<sup>c</sup> knowing good and evil.”<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”<sup>10</sup> He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and

<sup>a</sup> Heb *ishshah*

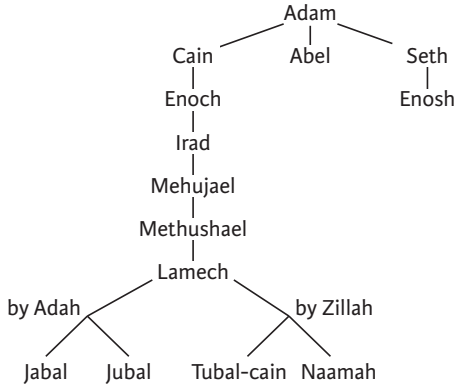
<sup>b</sup> Heb *ish*

<sup>c</sup> Or *gods*

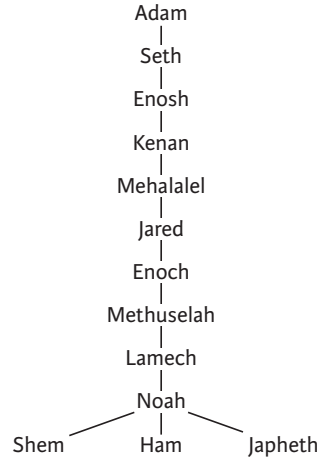
firm in the making of the first human from earthy “humus” (see v. 7n), so also the connection of men and women is affirmed here through the crowning event of creation: the making of the woman from a part of the man (2.21–22). The man affirms this connection in a jubilant poem (2.23) featuring a wordplay on “man” (Heb “ish”) and “woman” (“ishshah”). This concluding song praising 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 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 is a sophisticated narrative describing how God’s acts and their aftermath lead to the formation of fully adult, mortal humans to till the earth outside the garden (2.5), separated from animals by both bodily shame (requiring clothing) and an awareness of good and evil otherwise possessed only by God. **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). **3:** The woman’s quote of God’s prohibition diverges in several respects from the report of it in 2.17: Even though it was addressed to the first man, she assumes that she was included in the prohibition; her description of the forbidden tree as the one “in the midst of the garden” leaves confusion about which tree is forbidden (see 2.9n.); she adds a prohibition against touching the tree; and she revises the consequence of eating it from “you will certainly die” to “you shall die” (see 3.22–23n). **4–5:** The snake introduces doubt by insisting that the humans “will not certainly die” (NRSV you will not die), and attributing God’s prohibition to God’s fear that humans would have their eyes *opened* (see v. 7) so they gain godlike wisdom, *knowing good and evil*. **6–7:** The woman sees that the 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 their first move from childlike/animal-like unashamed nakedness to civilized adulthood. **8–13:** The disintegration of the earlier simple bond between God, the man, and the woman 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 follow the man in blaming the

The descendants of Adam according to the Yahwistic source (Gen 4)



The descendants of Adam according to the Priestly source (Gen 5)



I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”<sup>11</sup> He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

<sup>12</sup>The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.”<sup>13</sup> 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.”<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup>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.”

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;  
 in pain you shall bring forth children,  
 yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
 and he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup>And to the man<sup>a</sup> 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;  
<sup>18</sup>thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;  
 and you shall eat the plants of the field.

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face  
 you shall eat bread  
 until you return to the ground,

<sup>a</sup> Or to Adam

woman (e.g., Sir 25.24; 1 Tim 2.14). **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:** Whereas God’s curse of the snake and man both start with judgments for what each did, God’s speech to the woman merely describes her future fate and lacks the word “curse.” It is not introducing a new state, where previously procreative women will now bear children only in pain. In fact, the word translated as “pain” in childbirth may refer instead to her “toil” of endless pregnancies, 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

for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup>The man named his wife Eve,<sup>3</sup> because she was the mother of all living.<sup>21</sup> And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man<sup>b</sup> and for his wife, and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup>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”—<sup>23</sup>therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

<sup>24</sup>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<sup>c</sup> a man with the help of the LORD.”<sup>2</sup> Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.<sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,<sup>4</sup> and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat por-

tions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.<sup>6</sup> The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?<sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup>Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.”<sup>d</sup> And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”<sup>10</sup> And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!<sup>11</sup> And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.<sup>12</sup> When you till the ground, it will no longer

<sup>a</sup> In Heb *Eve* resembles the word for *living*

<sup>b</sup> Or *for Adam*

<sup>c</sup> The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Cain*

<sup>d</sup> Sam Gk Syr Compare Vg: MT lacks *Let us go out to the field*

the disintegration of original connectedness between them. **21:** The LORD God’s replacement of the humans’ stitched-together fig loincloths (3.7) with full-body skin tunics (NRSV garments) is a divine recognition of their complete transition, through gaining wisdom, from childlike innocence to adulthood. **22–23:** 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.). God’s speech to this court clarifies that the human gaining of godlike wisdom meant that God would send them from the garden, permanently preventing their immortality, so that they now will “certainly die” as God predicted in 2.17. At the same time, God’s sending them from the garden means that the absence of humans to “till the ground” noted at the outset of creation (2.5) is finally addressed (3.23). **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 half-human, half-lion Sphinx of Egypt. 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 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 in professions between Cain and Abel 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*. It is possible the ancient Israelite audience would have assumed a divine preference for animal sacrifice over the kind of vegetable sacrifice that Cain could offer. The text, however, focuses on Cain’s reaction to this unexplained divine preference for his brother’s sacrifice. **7:** This is the first mention of *sin* in the Bible. In this difficult verse, sin is somehow linked with the risk to Cain if he does “not do well” in dealing with his anger. **10–11:** Blood is sacred, for it is the

yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”<sup>13</sup> Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Not so!<sup>a</sup> Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.<sup>16</sup> Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,<sup>b</sup> east of Eden.

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

<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

<sup>25</sup> Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, “God has appointed<sup>c</sup> for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.”<sup>26</sup> To 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,<sup>d</sup> he made them<sup>e</sup> in the likeness of God.<sup>2</sup> Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them “Humankind”<sup>d</sup> when they were created.

<sup>3</sup> When 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.<sup>4</sup> The days of Adam after he

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Therefore*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Wandering*

<sup>c</sup> The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Seth*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *adam*

<sup>e</sup> Heb *him*

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.** Deriving from a different source than 5.1–32, most of the names here are variants of those found there, but not in the same order. 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, introducing the new line of Seth. 26: This Yahwistic 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,

became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>5</sup>Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.

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

<sup>9</sup>When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan. <sup>10</sup>Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. <sup>11</sup>Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.

<sup>12</sup>When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel. <sup>13</sup>Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. <sup>14</sup>Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

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

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

<sup>21</sup>When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. <sup>22</sup>Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuse-

lah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup>Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. <sup>24</sup>Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

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

<sup>28</sup>When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son; <sup>29</sup>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.” <sup>30</sup>Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup>Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; and he died.

<sup>32</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. <sup>3</sup>Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide<sup>a</sup> in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” <sup>4</sup>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

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

each of whom lived fantastically long times. As in those lists, here too ages decline 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 speculated at length on Enoch’s travels. **29:** Noah’s name, which comes from the Hebrew verb “rest,” anticipates his founding of viticulture (9.20), providing wine that relieves the curse of the ground (3.17–19).

**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 limits their life span to *one hundred twenty* years, the life span of Moses (Deut 34.7). Nothing appears to happen to the *sons of God* (see the “heavenly court” in 1.26n.) who instigated it all, though this becomes a matter of great speculation in postbiblical literature. **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).



them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

<sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

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

<sup>11</sup> Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. <sup>12</sup> And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Make yourself an ark of cypress<sup>a</sup> wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. <sup>15</sup> This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. <sup>16</sup> Make a roof<sup>b</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> 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.” <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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.” <sup>5</sup> And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *window*

**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 and 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 than placing one tradition as a block after the other, 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 found in Atrahasis and Gilgamesh tablet 11, 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 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

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

<sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. <sup>13</sup>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, <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. <sup>16</sup>And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

<sup>17</sup>The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. <sup>18</sup>The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. <sup>19</sup>The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains

under the whole heaven were covered; <sup>20</sup>the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. <sup>21</sup>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; <sup>22</sup>everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. <sup>23</sup>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. <sup>24</sup>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; <sup>2</sup>the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, <sup>3</sup>and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; <sup>4</sup>and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. <sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made <sup>7</sup>and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. <sup>8</sup>Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of

sacrifice and the distinction between clean and unclean animals (see Lev 11) were not introduced until the revelation at Sinai. Therefore only one pair of each species suffices (6.19–20; 7.14–15; cf. 7.9). 6–16: Noah, his family, and the animals enter the ark twice (7.7–9 || 7.13–16), reflecting the interweaving of the two originally distinct flood accounts. 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), reversing P's creation story. 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 powerfully represents a return to chaos. Though many world traditions speak of floods, there is no geological evidence of a global flood like that 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



the ground; <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

<sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry. <sup>15</sup>Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup>“Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. <sup>17</sup>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.” <sup>18</sup>So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives. <sup>19</sup>And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. <sup>21</sup>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.

<sup>22</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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.

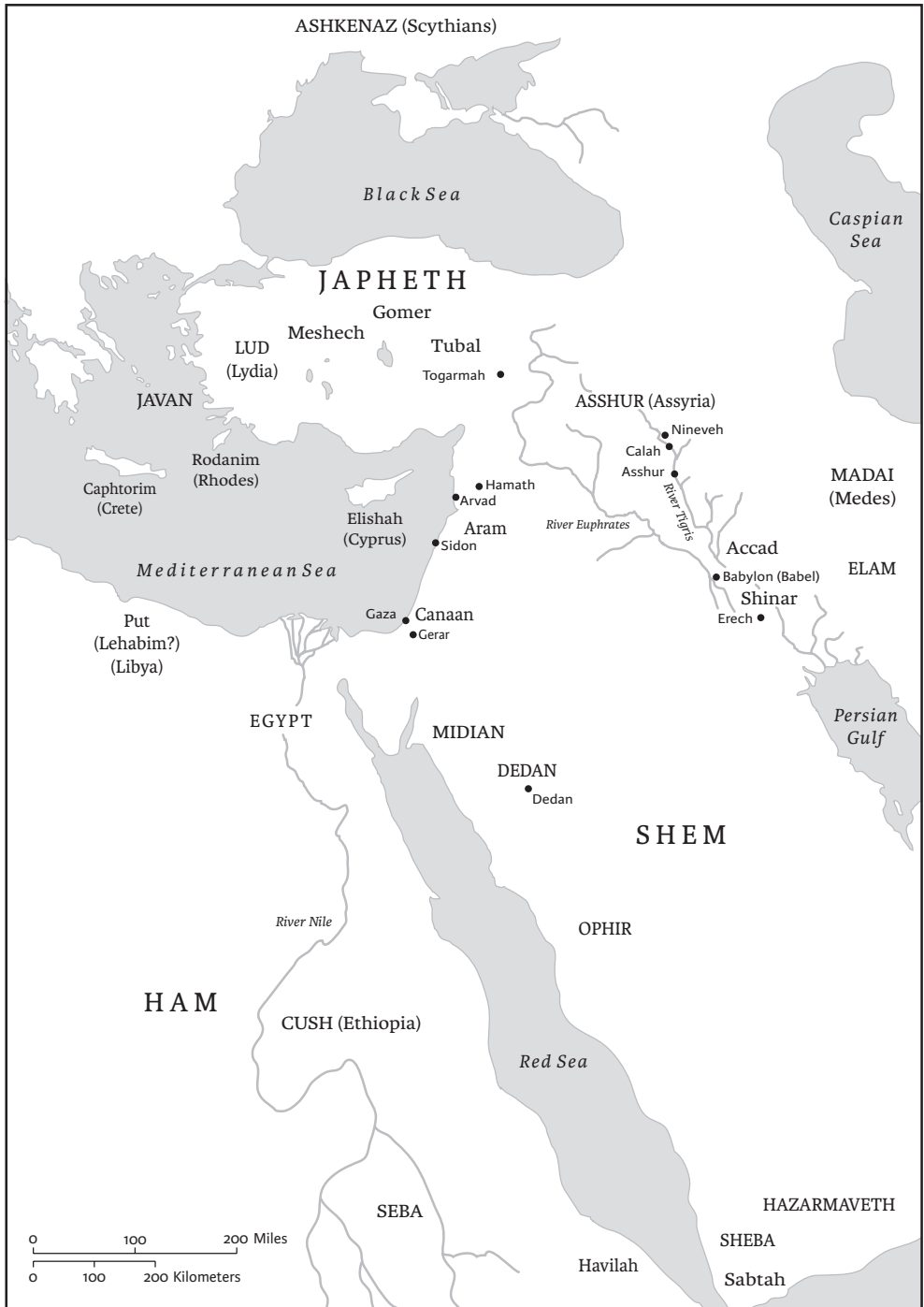
<sup>3</sup>Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. <sup>4</sup>Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.

<sup>5</sup>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.

<sup>6</sup>Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed;

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 human nature 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, assuring agricultural fertility. 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 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 limits human rule and regulates pre-flood 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



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

for in his own image

God made humankind.

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

<sup>8</sup> Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, <sup>9</sup> “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, <sup>10</sup> 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.” <sup>11</sup> 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.” <sup>12</sup> 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: <sup>13</sup> I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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.”

<sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. <sup>19</sup> These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

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

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

<sup>26</sup> He also said,

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

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb adds *every animal of the earth*

(1.26–27), may not be murdered. 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 Noachide 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 mentioned 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 links to the explanation of Noah’s name in 5.29 (see note) and repeats major themes from the pre-flood period: farming, (nakedness, alienation in the family, curse, and domination). Though this text was once widely misread as describing a “curse of Ham” justifying slavery of African peoples, Noah’s curse here is actually directed at Canaan, a figure not seen as an ancestor of African peoples. **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. Ham here does the opposite. 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). An editor may have 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.).

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

<sup>28</sup> After the flood Noah lived three hundred fifty years. <sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. <sup>3</sup> The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. <sup>4</sup> The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.<sup>b</sup> <sup>5</sup> From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the descendants of Japheth<sup>c</sup> in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations.

<sup>6</sup> The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. <sup>7</sup> The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. <sup>8</sup> Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” <sup>10</sup> The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup> From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and <sup>12</sup> Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. <sup>13</sup> Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim,

<sup>14</sup> Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Caphtorim, from which the Philistines come.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Canaan became the father of Sidon his firstborn, and Heth,<sup>16</sup> and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites,<sup>17</sup> the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites,<sup>18</sup> the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. Afterward the families of the Canaanites spread abroad. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> These are the descendants of Ham, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>21</sup> To Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, children were born. <sup>22</sup> The descendants of Shem: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. <sup>23</sup> The descendants of Aram: Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash. <sup>24</sup> Arpachshad became the father of Shelah; and Shelah became the father of Eber. <sup>25</sup> To Eber were born two sons: the name of the one was Peleg,<sup>e</sup> for in his days the earth was divided, and his brother's name was Joktan. <sup>26</sup> Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,

<sup>a</sup> Heb *yapht*, a play on *Japheth*

<sup>b</sup> Heb Mss Sam Gk See 1 Chr 1.7: MT *Dodanim*

<sup>c</sup> Compare verses 20, 31. Heb lacks *These are the descendants of Japheth*

<sup>d</sup> Cn: Heb *Casluhim*, from which the Philistines come, and *Caphtorim*

<sup>e</sup> That is *Division*

**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 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). **14:** See Jer 47.4; Am 9.7. Modern scholarship suggests that the Philistines originated from the Aegean. **15:** Canaan is the father of two sons, *Heth* (representing the Hittites originally of Asia Minor [Turkey]) and *Sidon* (who represents the Phoenician coastal cities). **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*, whose name may be related to the word “Hebrew.” If so, this text postulates a wider group of *children of Eber* of which the Israelites are a part.

<sup>27</sup> Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup> Obal, Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup> Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the descendants of Joktan. <sup>30</sup> The territory in which they lived extended from Mesha in the direction of Sephar, the hill country of the east. <sup>31</sup> These are the descendants of Shem, by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations.

<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> And as they migrated from the east,<sup>a</sup> they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> 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."

<sup>5</sup> The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." <sup>8</sup> So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left

off building the city. <sup>9</sup> Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused<sup>b</sup> the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

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

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

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

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

<sup>18</sup> When Peleg had lived thirty years, he became the father of Reu; <sup>19</sup> and Peleg lived after the birth of Reu two hundred nine years, and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup> When Reu had lived thirty-two years, he became the father of Serug; <sup>21</sup> and Reu lived after the birth of Serug two hundred

<sup>a</sup> Or *migrated eastward*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *balal*, meaning to *confuse*

**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). This story then focuses on a scattering of the human family into different ethnic, linguistic, and territorial groups, and 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 aim 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 completing the movement toward cultural maturity begun in ch 3. 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. 28.16–17n.), serves as a final testimony to the results of this process.

**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

seven years, and had other sons and daughters.

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

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

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

<sup>27</sup> Now these are the descendants of Terah. Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.

<sup>28</sup> Haran died before his father Terah in the

land of his birth, in Ur of the Chaldeans.

<sup>29</sup> Abram 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 the father of Milcah and Iscah.

<sup>30</sup> Now Sarai was barren; she had no child.

<sup>31</sup> Terah 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. <sup>32</sup> The days of Terah were two hundred five years; and Terah died in Haran.

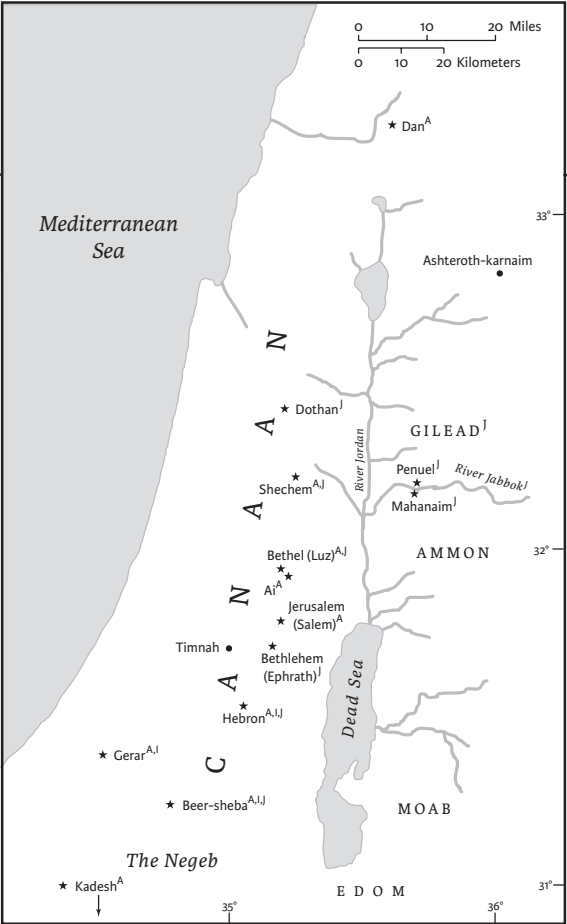
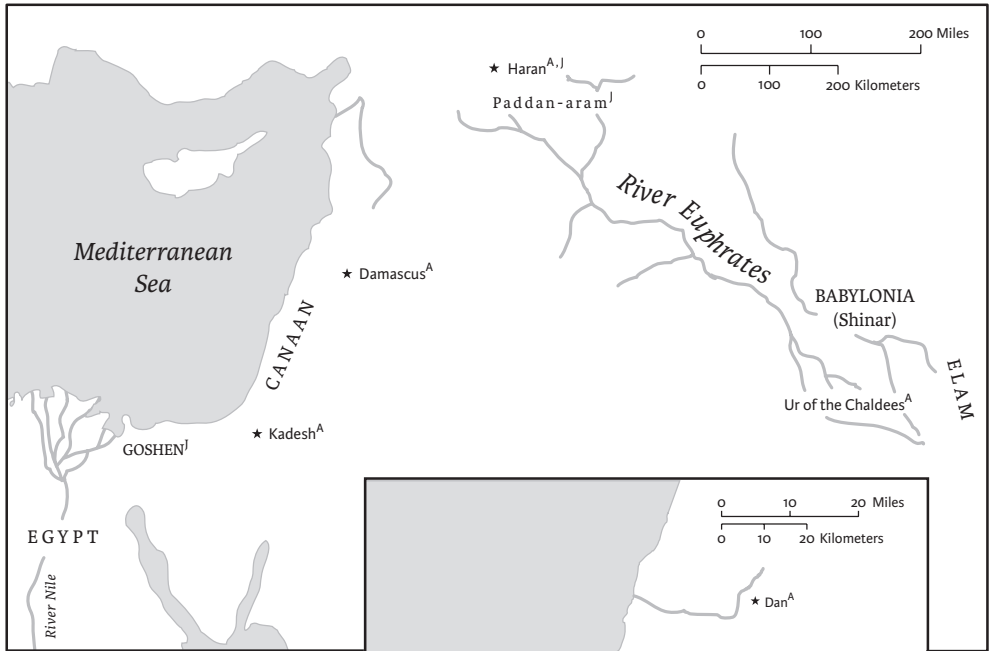
**12** Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. <sup>2</sup> I will make of you a great nation,

of the genealogy of Shem (10.21–31) are repeated, but now the text focuses on those firstborn male descendants who lead to Abraham, 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, including 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 the Abraham stories incorporate 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 (Elohistic source) fragments in chs 20–22. Others suggest that they were composed as a single whole, though building on a range of separate traditions (see the Introduction and 20.1–18n.). Scholars generally agree, however, that 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) were added later. For patterns uniting this complex whole, see "Chiasm in the Abraham Story" on p. 39.

**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 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 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 places 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, motivating much of the following narrative. *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



**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).



and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>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.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. <sup>5</sup>Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons 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, <sup>6</sup>Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak<sup>b</sup> of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring<sup>c</sup> I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>When he was about to enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know well that you are a woman beautiful in appearance; <sup>12</sup>and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, “This is his wife”; then they will kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup>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.” <sup>14</sup>When Abram entered Egypt the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful. <sup>15</sup>When the officials of Pharaoh saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh. And the woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house. <sup>16</sup>And for her sake he dealt well with Abram; and he had sheep, oxen, male donkeys, male and female slaves, female donkeys, and camels.

- <sup>a</sup> Or *by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*  
<sup>b</sup> Or *terebinth*  
<sup>c</sup> Heb *seed*

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 later 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* means that the LORD will 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 Jewish scriptures, 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. 28). Sacred trees like the *oak of Moreh* (“oracle giver”; cf. 13.18; 18.1; 35.4; Deut 11.30; Josh 24.26) 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.).

**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).



<sup>17</sup> But the LORD afflicted Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife. <sup>18</sup> 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?" <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver, and in gold. <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> to the place where he had made an altar at the first; and there Abram called on the name of the LORD. <sup>5</sup> Now Lot, who went with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents, <sup>6</sup> so that the land could not support both of them living together; for their possessions were so great that they could not live together, <sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> So Lot chose for himself all the plain of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward; thus they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup> Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom. <sup>13</sup> Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the LORD.

<sup>14</sup> 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; <sup>15</sup> for all the land that you see I will give to you and to your offspring<sup>a</sup> forever. <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> Rise up, walk through the length and the breadth of the land, for I will give it to you."

<sup>18</sup> So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks<sup>b</sup> 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, <sup>2</sup> these kings made war with King Bera of Sodom, King Birsha of Gomorrah, King Shinab of Admah, King Shemeber of Ze-

<sup>a</sup> Heb *seed*

<sup>b</sup> Or *terebinth*s

**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 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 relate to each other (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 had 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

boiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar).<sup>3</sup> All these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Dead Sea).<sup>a</sup> <sup>4</sup>Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. <sup>5</sup>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,<sup>6</sup> and the Horites in the hill country of Seir as far as El-paran on the edge of the wilderness;<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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<sup>9</sup> with King Chedorlaomer of Elam, King Tidal of Goiim, King Amraphel of Shinar, and King Arioch of Ellasar, four kings against five. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>So the enemy took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their provisions, and went their way; <sup>12</sup>they also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

<sup>13</sup>Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oaks<sup>b</sup> of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and of Aner; these were allies of Abram. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed them and pursued them to Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>Then he brought back all the goods, and also brought back his nephew Lot with his goods, and the women and the people.

<sup>17</sup>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). <sup>18</sup>And King Melchizedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High.<sup>c</sup> <sup>19</sup>He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High,<sup>c</sup> maker of heaven and earth; <sup>20</sup>and blessed be God Most High,<sup>c</sup> who has delivered your enemies into your hand!"

And Abram gave him one-tenth of everything. <sup>21</sup>Then the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, but take the goods for yourself." <sup>22</sup>But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD, God Most High,<sup>c</sup> maker of heaven and earth, <sup>23</sup>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.' <sup>24</sup>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."

<sup>a</sup> Heb *Salt Sea*

<sup>b</sup> Or *terebinths*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *El Elyon*

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 an outsider, as often in the Bible (see, e.g., 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, albeit in the shortened form, Salem. 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 likely 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 Jerusalemite 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** 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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?”<sup>3</sup> And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.”<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD; and the LORD<sup>b</sup> reckoned it to him as righteousness.

<sup>7</sup> Then he said to him, “I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess.”<sup>8</sup> But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?”<sup>9</sup> He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.<sup>13</sup> Then the LORD<sup>b</sup> 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;<sup>14</sup> but I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.<sup>15</sup> As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.<sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram,

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *he*

**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, and are ambiguous, 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 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 and frequent elsewhere). 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 likely modified this in v. 13 to four hundred years in order to better match Priestly material in Exodus 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.,

saying, “To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,<sup>19</sup> the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites,<sup>20</sup> the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim,<sup>21</sup> the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

**16** Now Sarai, Abram’s wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian slave-girl whose name was Hagar,<sup>2</sup> and Sarai 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress.<sup>5</sup> 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!”<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup>The angel of the LORD found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.<sup>8</sup> 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.”<sup>9</sup> The angel of the LORD said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her.”<sup>10</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.”<sup>11</sup> And the angel of the LORD said to her,

“Now you have conceived and shall bear a son;

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. 39), 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 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”) implies only 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

you shall call him Ishmael,<sup>a</sup>  
for the LORD has given heed to your  
affliction.

<sup>12</sup> 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.”

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

<sup>15</sup> Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram  
named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael.

<sup>16</sup> Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar  
bore him<sup>e</sup> Ishmael.

**17** When Abram was ninety-nine years old,  
the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to  
him, “I am God Almighty,<sup>f</sup> walk before me, and  
be blameless. <sup>2</sup> And I will make my covenant  
between me and you, and will make you ex-  
ceedingly numerous.” <sup>3</sup> Then Abram fell on his  
face; and God said to him, <sup>4</sup> “As for me, this is  
my covenant with you: You shall be the ances-  
tor of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup> No longer shall

your name be Abram,<sup>g</sup> but your name shall be  
Abraham;<sup>h</sup> for I have made you the ancestor  
of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup> I will make you  
exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations  
of you, and kings shall come from you. <sup>7</sup> I 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<sup>i</sup> after you.  
<sup>8</sup> And 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.”

<sup>9</sup> God said to Abraham, “As for you, you  
shall keep my covenant, you and your

<sup>a</sup> That is *God hears*

<sup>b</sup> Perhaps *God of seeing* or *God who sees*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> That is *the Well of the Living One who sees me*

<sup>e</sup> Heb *Abram*

<sup>f</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

<sup>g</sup> That is *exalted ancestor*

<sup>h</sup> Here taken to mean *ancestor of a multitude*

<sup>i</sup> Heb *seed*

(see note *a* and 21.17). 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 Shaddai”) is variously understood as “God [or “El”], the one of the mountains,” “God of the Shaddai [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 promise of offspring in the covenant. 5: A new name signifies a new relationship or status (see 32.28). *Abram* means “the [divine] ancestor is exalted,” as does its dialectical variant here, *Abraham*. This verse, however, explains the extra syllable *ham* in *Abraham* as from the Hebrew word, “*hamon*” (multitude), thus meaning that *Abraham* will now be *ancestor of a multitude*. This anticipates nations whose ancestry will be 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, suggesting that *Abraham's* line is now the recipient of the blessing originally intended for all humanity. 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. 9–14: Circumcision was an ancient rite practiced among some Semitic groups, perhaps originally connected to marriage and fertility (see 34.14–17), elsewhere connected 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: In the text's final form, *Abraham's* laughter here in the Priestly tradition anticipates *Sarah's* laughter in the non-Priestly account (18.9–15n.).



offspring after you throughout their generations.<sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.<sup>11</sup> You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.<sup>12</sup> Throughout 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.<sup>13</sup> Both 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.”

<sup>15</sup> God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.<sup>16</sup> I 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.”<sup>17</sup> Then 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?”<sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, “O that Ishmael might live in your sight!”<sup>19</sup> God said, “No, but your wife Sarah shall bear you a son, and you shall name him Isaac.<sup>3</sup> I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his offspring after him.<sup>20</sup> As 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.<sup>21</sup> But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.”<sup>22</sup> And when he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham.

<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.<sup>25</sup> And his son Ishmael was thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.<sup>26</sup> That very day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised;<sup>27</sup> 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<sup>b</sup> by the oaks<sup>c</sup> of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> He said, “My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant.<sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, “Make ready quickly three measures<sup>d</sup> of choice flour, knead it, and make cakes.”<sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it.<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> They said to him, “Where is your wife Sarah?” And he said, “There, in the tent.”<sup>10</sup> Then one said, “I will surely return to

<sup>a</sup> That is *he laughs*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *him*

<sup>c</sup> Or *terebinths*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *seahs*

**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 Abraham’s ideal hospitality 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

you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent entrance behind him.<sup>11</sup> Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; it had ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.<sup>12</sup> So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure?”<sup>13</sup> The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’<sup>14</sup> 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.”<sup>15</sup> But Sarah denied, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. He said, “Oh yes, you did laugh.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the men set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom; and Abraham went with them to set them on their way.<sup>17</sup> The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do,<sup>18</sup> seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?<sup>a</sup> <sup>19</sup> No, for I have chosen<sup>b</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, “How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!<sup>21</sup> 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.”

<sup>22</sup> So the men turned from there, and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the LORD.<sup>c</sup> <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you

indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?<sup>24</sup> 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?<sup>25</sup> 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?”<sup>26</sup> And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.”<sup>27</sup> Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes.<sup>28</sup> 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.”<sup>29</sup> Again he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.

<sup>a</sup> Or *and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *known*

<sup>c</sup> Another ancient tradition reads *while the LORD remained standing before Abraham*

(eventually Isaac, 21.1–3). 11: *Ceased . . . after the manner of women*, a circumlocution for menopause. 12: Isaac’s name means “he [God] laughs”; 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 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** 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. <sup>2</sup>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.” <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>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; <sup>5</sup>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.” <sup>6</sup>Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, <sup>7</sup>and said, “I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. <sup>8</sup>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.” <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>But the men inside reached out their hands and brought Lot into the house with them, and shut the door. <sup>11</sup>And they 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.

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>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.” <sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>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.”

<sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>When they had brought them outside, they<sup>a</sup> 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.” <sup>18</sup>And Lot said to them, “Oh, no, my lords; <sup>19</sup>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. <sup>20</sup>Look, that city is near enough to flee to, and it is a little one. Let

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Vg: Heb *he*

**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 the 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, unfatherly 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 imitator who does not deserve to be the heir of the promise to Abraham. **12–14:** In place of Sarah’s laughter (Heb “tšḥq”) in the preceding hospitality scene (18.11–14), we have here the Sodomite *sons-in-law* assuming that Lot is *jesting* (Heb “tšḥq”). **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 vv. 20 and 22 and note *a*) lest he be caught up in the coming



me escape there—is it not a little one?—and my life will be saved!”<sup>21</sup> He said to him, “Very well, I grant you this favor too, and will not overthrow the city of which you have spoken.<sup>22</sup> Hurry, escape there, for I can do nothing until you arrive there.” Therefore the city was called Zoar.<sup>a</sup><sup>23</sup> The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.

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

<sup>27</sup>Abraham went early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the LORD;<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup>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.

<sup>30</sup>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.<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve offspring through our father.”<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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 offspring through our father.”<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Thus both the daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father.<sup>37</sup> The firstborn bore a son, and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day.<sup>38</sup> 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

<sup>a</sup> That is *Little*

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. Such etiological notes (accounts of origin) are common in the Bible, especially in Genesis. 29: This is a Priestly summary of the story, echoing 8.1 and attributing Lot’s rescue to his relation with Abraham. 37–38: This episode 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 Gen 12–19, but details of Gen 20–22 are understandable only when these chapters are read following Gen 12–19.

residing in Gerar as an alien, <sup>2</sup> Abraham said of his wife Sarah, “She is my sister.” And King Abimelech of Gerar sent and took Sarah. <sup>3</sup> 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.” <sup>4</sup> Now Abimelech had not approached her; so he said, “LORD, will you destroy an innocent people? <sup>5</sup> 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.” <sup>6</sup> Then God said to him in the dream, “Yes, I know that you did this in the integrity of your heart; furthermore it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What were you thinking of, that you did this thing?” <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Besides, she is indeed my sister, the daughter of my father but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> 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.’” <sup>14</sup> Then Abimelech took sheep and oxen, and male and female slaves, and gave them to Abraham, and restored his wife Sarah to him. <sup>15</sup> Abimelech said, “My land is before you; settle where it pleases you.” <sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God; and God healed Abimelech, and also healed his

#### 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 (11.27–30)
- 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). 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).

wife and female slaves so that they bore children.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the time of which God had spoken to him.<sup>3</sup> Abraham gave the name Isaac to his son whom Sarah bore him.<sup>4</sup> And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him.<sup>5</sup> Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.<sup>6</sup> Now Sarah said, "God has brought laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh with me."<sup>7</sup> 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."

<sup>8</sup> The child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned.<sup>9</sup> But Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac.<sup>10</sup> 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."<sup>11</sup> The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son.<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> As for the son of the

slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring."<sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> When the water in the skin was gone, she cast the child under one of the bushes.<sup>16</sup> Then she went and sat down opposite him a good way off, about the distance of a bowshot; 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.<sup>17</sup> 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."<sup>18</sup> Come, lift up the boy and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make a great nation of him."<sup>19</sup> 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.

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

<sup>22</sup> At that time Abimelech, with Phicol the commander of his army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in all that you do;<sup>23</sup> now therefore swear to me here by God that you

<sup>a</sup> Gk Vg: Heb lacks *with her son Isaac*

**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" her (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 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

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.”<sup>24</sup> And Abraham said, “I swear it.”

<sup>25</sup> When Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech’s servants had seized, <sup>26</sup> Abimelech said, “I do not know who has done this; you did not tell me, and I have not heard of it until today.”<sup>27</sup> So Abraham took sheep and oxen and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a covenant. <sup>28</sup> Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs of the flock. <sup>29</sup> And Abimelech said to Abraham, “What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs that you have set apart?”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> Therefore that place was called Beer-sheba;<sup>a</sup> because there both of them swore an oath. <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> Abraham<sup>b</sup> planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the Everlasting God.<sup>c</sup> <sup>34</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> He said, “Take your

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.”<sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. <sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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?”<sup>8</sup> Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

<sup>9</sup> 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

<sup>a</sup> That is *Well of seven* or *Well of the oath*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *He*

<sup>c</sup> Or *the LORD, El Olam*

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 [Heb sheva]” (see 22.28–30) with an explanation (parallel to 26.31–33) that it means “well of oath [shevu’ah].” **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). In general, the Bible suggests that God may control future events, but not that God knows all future events. **1b–2:** After giving up Ishmael earlier (see 21.8–21n.), Abraham must now 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

top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill<sup>a</sup> his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” <sup>12</sup> 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.” <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> So Abraham called that place “The LORD will provide”;<sup>b</sup> as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.”<sup>c</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, <sup>16</sup> and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> 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, <sup>18</sup> and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” <sup>19</sup> So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.

<sup>20</sup> Now after these things it was told Abraham, “Milchah also has borne children, to your brother Nahor: <sup>21</sup> Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, <sup>22</sup> Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel.” <sup>23</sup> Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight Milchah bore to Nahor, Abraham’s brother. <sup>24</sup> Moreover, his concu-

bine, 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> Abraham rose up from beside his dead, and said to the Hittites, <sup>4</sup> “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.” <sup>5</sup> The Hittites answered Abraham, <sup>6</sup> “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.” <sup>7</sup> Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land. <sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> “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.” <sup>12</sup> Then Abraham bowed down before the

<sup>a</sup> Or to slaughter

<sup>b</sup> Or will see; Heb traditionally transliterated *Jehovah Jireh*

<sup>c</sup> Or he shall be seen

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.

**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) and should not be confused with the ancient Hittites, who resided in Asia Minor (Turkey). **4–16:** The narrative stresses the legitimacy of the Israelites’ claim to this burial plot. **10:** Legal



people of the land. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> Ephron answered Abraham, <sup>15</sup> “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.” <sup>16</sup> 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.

<sup>17</sup> 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 <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Abraham said to his servant, the oldest of his house, who had charge of all that he had, “Put your hand under my thigh <sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> but will go to my country and to my

kindred and get a wife for my son Isaac.”

<sup>5</sup> 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?” <sup>6</sup> Abraham said to him, “See to it that you do not take my son back there. <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> 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.” <sup>9</sup> So the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master and swore to him concerning this matter.

<sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> And he said, “O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham. <sup>13</sup> I am standing here by the spring of water, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. <sup>14</sup> 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.”

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); see 24.22n. **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 Deuteronomy (e.g., Deut 7.3–4) and texts influenced by Deuteronomy. **10–27:** 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., 29.2–12; Ex 2.15–22). **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

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please let me sip a little water from your jar." <sup>18</sup> "Drink, my lord," she said, and quickly lowered her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. <sup>19</sup> When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." <sup>20</sup> So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough and ran again to the well to draw, and she drew for all his camels. <sup>21</sup> The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

<sup>22</sup> 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, <sup>23</sup> and said, "Tell me whose daughter you are. Is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?" <sup>24</sup> She said to him, "I am the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor." <sup>25</sup> She added, "We have plenty of straw and fodder and a place to spend the night." <sup>26</sup> The man bowed his head and worshiped the LORD <sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> Then the girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. <sup>29</sup> Rebekah had a brother whose name was Laban; and Laban ran out to the man, to the spring. <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> 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?" <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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."

<sup>34</sup> So he said, "I am Abraham's servant."

<sup>35</sup> 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. <sup>36</sup> And Sarah my master's wife bore a son to my master when she was old; and he has given him all that he has. <sup>37</sup> 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; <sup>38</sup> but you shall go to my father's house, to my kindred, and get a wife for my son.' <sup>39</sup> I said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not follow me.' <sup>40</sup> 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. <sup>41</sup> 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.'

<sup>42</sup> "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!' <sup>43</sup> 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,' <sup>44</sup> 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.'

<sup>45</sup> "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.' <sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> 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. <sup>48</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup>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."

<sup>50</sup>Then Laban and Bethuel answered, "The thing comes from the LORD; we cannot speak to you anything bad or good. <sup>51</sup>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."

<sup>52</sup>When Abraham's servant heard their words, he bowed himself to the ground before the LORD. <sup>53</sup>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. <sup>54</sup>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." <sup>55</sup>Her brother and her mother said, "Let the girl remain with us a while, at least ten days; after that she may go." <sup>56</sup>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." <sup>57</sup>They said, "We will call the girl, and ask her." <sup>58</sup>And they called Rebekah, and said to her, "Will you go with this man?" She said, "I will." <sup>59</sup>So they sent away their sister Rebekah and her nurse along with Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup>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."

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

<sup>62</sup>Now Isaac had come from<sup>a</sup> Beer-lahai-roi, and was settled in the Negeb. <sup>63</sup>Isaac went out in the evening to walk<sup>b</sup> in the field; and looking up, he saw camels com-

ing. <sup>64</sup>And Rebekah looked up, and when she saw Isaac, she slipped quickly from the camel, <sup>65</sup>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. <sup>66</sup>And the servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. <sup>67</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. <sup>3</sup>Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. <sup>4</sup>The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. All these were the children of Keturah. <sup>5</sup>Abraham gave all he had to Isaac. <sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>This is the length of Abraham's life, one hundred seventy-five years. <sup>8</sup>Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people. <sup>9</sup>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, <sup>10</sup>the field that Abraham purchased from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried, with his wife Sarah. <sup>11</sup>After the death of Abraham God blessed his son Isaac. And Isaac settled at Beer-lahai-roi.

<sup>12</sup>These are the descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's slave-girl, bore to Abraham. <sup>13</sup>These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel,

<sup>a</sup> Syr Tg: Heb *from coming to*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Heb word is uncertain

manifest in deeds. 15: See 22.20–23. 22: A *shekel* weighed 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.



Mibsam,<sup>14</sup> Mishma, Dumah, Massa,<sup>15</sup> Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.<sup>16</sup> These are the sons of Ishmael and these are their names, by their villages and by their encampments, twelve princes according to their tribes.<sup>17</sup> (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.)<sup>18</sup> They settled from Havilah to Shur, which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled down<sup>a</sup> alongside of<sup>b</sup> all his people.

<sup>19</sup> These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac,<sup>20</sup> and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.<sup>21</sup> Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his

wife Rebekah conceived.<sup>22</sup> The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?"<sup>c</sup> So she went to inquire of the LORD.<sup>23</sup> 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."

<sup>24</sup> When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb.<sup>25</sup> The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau.<sup>26</sup> Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named

<sup>a</sup> Heb *he fell*

<sup>b</sup> Or *down in opposition to*

<sup>c</sup> Syr: Meaning of Heb uncertain

For the genealogy of Abraham, see chart on p. 63. **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 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 putative ancestor (see 30.21n.; 34.1–31n. and 49.8–12n.). Later, still other texts were added, such as the gift of the Abraham 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). The story of Jacob's father, Isaac (26.1–33), links this large block to the previous Abraham material.

**CHIASM IN THE JACOB STORY**

As in the Abraham story (see p. 39), 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)

**25.19–28: Introduction of the descendants of Isaac.** **19–20:** Introductory Priestly material. For the genealogy of Isaac, see chart on p. 63. **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";

Jacob.<sup>a</sup> Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them.

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

<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.<sup>30</sup> Esau said to Jacob, “Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!” (Therefore he was called Edom.<sup>b</sup>)<sup>31</sup> Jacob said, “First sell me your birthright.”<sup>32</sup> Esau said, “I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?”<sup>33</sup> Jacob said, “Swear to me first.”<sup>c</sup> So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> The LORD appeared to Isaac<sup>d</sup> and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; settle in the land that I shall show you.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> I will make your offspring as numerous as the 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,<sup>5</sup> because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my

charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

<sup>6</sup> So Isaac settled in Gerar.<sup>7</sup> 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.”

<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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.”<sup>11</sup> So Abimelech warned all the people, saying, “Whoever touches this man or his wife shall be put to death.”

<sup>12</sup> Isaac sowed seed in that land, and in the same year reaped a hundredfold. The LORD blessed him,<sup>13</sup> and the man became rich; he prospered more and more until he became very wealthy.<sup>14</sup> He had possessions of flocks and herds, and a great household, so that the Philistines envied him.<sup>15</sup> (Now the Philistines had stopped up and filled with earth all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the

<sup>a</sup> That is *He takes by the heel* or *He supplants*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Red*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *today*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *him*

see Hos 12.3. 27–28: As in the Cain and Abel story (4.1–16), this narrative plays on the tension between the older and the younger brother and their different lifestyles.

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, 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 to pass it on to one of his sons (see ch 27). 8: *Fondling*, Heb “*metsaḥeq*,” another reference to Isaac’s name; see 18.12n.

days of his father Abraham.)<sup>16</sup> And Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”

<sup>17</sup> So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there.<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> But when Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water,<sup>20</sup> the herders of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herders, saying, “The water is ours.” So he called the well Esek,<sup>a</sup> because they contended with him.<sup>21</sup> Then they dug another well, and they quarreled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah.<sup>b</sup> <sup>22</sup> He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth,<sup>c</sup> saying, “Now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.”

<sup>23</sup> From there he went up to Beer-sheba.<sup>24</sup> 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.”<sup>25</sup> 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.

<sup>26</sup> Then Abimelech went to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his adviser and Phicol the commander of his army.<sup>27</sup> Isaac said to them, “Why have you come to me, seeing that you hate me and have sent me away from you?”<sup>28</sup> 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<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> So he made them a feast, and they ate and drank.<sup>31</sup> In the morning they rose early and exchanged oaths; and Isaac set them on their way, and they departed from him in peace.<sup>32</sup> 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!”<sup>33</sup> He called it Shibah;<sup>d</sup> therefore the name of the city is Beer-sheba<sup>e</sup> to this day.

<sup>34</sup> When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite;<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> He said, “See, I am old; I do not know the day of my death.<sup>3</sup> Now then, take your weapons, your quiver and your bow, and go out to the field, and hunt game for me.<sup>4</sup> 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.”

<sup>5</sup> 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,<sup>6</sup> Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father say to your brother Esau,<sup>7</sup> ‘Bring me game, and prepare for me savory food to eat, that I may bless you before the LORD before I die.’<sup>8</sup> Now therefore, my son, obey my word as I command you.<sup>9</sup> Go to the flock, and get

<sup>a</sup> That is *Contention*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Enmity*

<sup>c</sup> That is *Broad places* or *Room*

<sup>d</sup> A word resembling the word for *oath*

<sup>e</sup> That is *Well of the oath* or *Well of seven*

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 note on Esau’s difficult marriages was originally connected with 27.46–28.9 (P). Its current placement 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 irrevocably 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 makes clear that this is Isaac’s transfer of a

me two choice kids, so that I may prepare from them savory food for your father, such as he likes;<sup>10</sup> and you shall take it to your father to eat, so that he may bless you before he dies.”<sup>11</sup> But Jacob said to his mother Rebekah, “Look, my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I am a man of smooth skin.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be mocking him, and bring a curse on myself and not a blessing.”<sup>13</sup> His mother said to him, “Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my word, and go, get them for me.”<sup>14</sup> So he went and got them and brought them to his mother; and his mother prepared savory food, such as his father loved.<sup>15</sup> 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;<sup>16</sup> and she put the skins of the kids on his hands and on the smooth part of his neck.<sup>17</sup> Then she handed the savory food, and the bread that she had prepared, to her son Jacob.

<sup>18</sup> So he went in to his father, and said, “My father”; and he said, “Here I am; who are you, my son?”<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> 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.”<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup> He did not recognize him, because his hands were hairy like his brother Esau’s hands; so he blessed him.<sup>24</sup> He said, “Are you really my son Esau?” He answered, “I am.”<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.”<sup>27</sup> 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.

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

<sup>29</sup> 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!”

<sup>30</sup> As soon as Isaac had finished blessing Jacob, when Jacob had scarcely gone out from the presence of his father Isaac, his brother Esau came in from his hunting.<sup>31</sup> 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.”<sup>32</sup> His father Isaac said to him, “Who are you?” He answered, “I am your firstborn son, Esau.”<sup>33</sup> Then Isaac trembled violently, and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate it all<sup>a</sup> before you came, and I have blessed him?—yes, and blessed he shall be!”<sup>34</sup> 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!”<sup>35</sup> But he said, “Your brother came deceitfully, and he has taken away your blessing.”<sup>36</sup> Esau said, “Is he not rightly named Jacob?<sup>b</sup> 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?”<sup>37</sup> 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?”<sup>38</sup> Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing, father? Bless me, me also, father!” And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Heb of all

<sup>b</sup> That is *He supplants* or *He takes by the heel*

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. The Heb offers a wordplay between *my*

<sup>39</sup> Then his father Isaac answered him: “See, away from<sup>a</sup> the fatness of the earth shall your home be, and away from<sup>b</sup> the dew of heaven on high.

<sup>40</sup> By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose,<sup>c</sup> you shall break his yoke from your neck.”

<sup>41</sup> 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.”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> Now therefore, my son, obey my voice; flee at once to my brother Laban in Haran,<sup>44</sup> and stay with him a while, until your brother’s fury turns away—<sup>45</sup> 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?”

<sup>46</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> May God Almighty<sup>d</sup> bless

you and make you fruitful and numerous, that you may become a company of peoples.

<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> Thus Isaac sent Jacob away; and he went to Paddan-aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, Jacob’s and Esau’s mother.

<sup>6</sup> 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,”<sup>7</sup> and that Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.<sup>8</sup> So when Esau saw that the Canaanite women did not please his father Isaac,<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> And he dreamed that there was a ladder<sup>e</sup> set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.<sup>13</sup> And the LORD

<sup>a</sup> Or *See, of*

<sup>b</sup> Or *and of*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

<sup>e</sup> Or *stairway or ramp*

*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. **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-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. 28) 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



stood beside him<sup>a</sup> 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;<sup>14</sup> 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<sup>b</sup> in you and in your offspring.<sup>15</sup> 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.”<sup>16</sup> Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place—and I did not know it!”<sup>17</sup> 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.”

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> He called that place Bethel;<sup>c</sup> but the name of the city was Luz at the first.<sup>20</sup> 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,<sup>21</sup> so that I come again to my father’s house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> As he looked, he saw a well in the field 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob said to them, “My brothers, where do you come from?” They said, “We are from Haran.”<sup>5</sup> He said to them, “Do you know Laban son of Nahor?” They said, “We do.”<sup>6</sup> He said to them, “Is it well with him?” “Yes,” they replied, “and here is his daughter Rachel, coming with the sheep.”<sup>7</sup> 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.”<sup>8</sup> 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.”

<sup>9</sup> While he was still speaking with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep; for she kept them.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Then Jacob kissed Rachel, and wept aloud.<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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<sup>d</sup> told Laban all these things,<sup>14</sup> and Laban said to him, “Surely you

<sup>a</sup> Or *stood above it*

<sup>b</sup> Or *shall bless themselves*

<sup>c</sup> That is *House of God*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *He*

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 [the Canaanite deity] El”) as *house of God* (*Heb’el*). *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: See 24:10–27n. 4–5: See 24:10n.; 26:43. 10: Jacob, the

are my bone and my flesh!” And he stayed with him a month.

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

<sup>21</sup> Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. <sup>23</sup> But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. <sup>24</sup> (Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) <sup>25</sup> 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?” <sup>26</sup> Laban said, “This is not done in our country—giving the younger before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup> Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” <sup>28</sup> Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife. <sup>29</sup> (Laban gave his maid Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her maid.) <sup>30</sup> So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. He served Laban<sup>b</sup> for another seven years.

<sup>31</sup> When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren. <sup>32</sup> Leah conceived and bore a son, and she named him Reuben;<sup>c</sup> for she said, “Because the LORD has looked on my affliction; surely now my husband will love me.” <sup>33</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “Because the LORD has heard<sup>d</sup> that I am hated, he has given me this son also”; and she named him Simeon. <sup>34</sup> Again she conceived and bore a son, and said, “Now this time my husband will be joined<sup>e</sup> to me, because I have borne him three sons”; therefore he was named Levi. <sup>35</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, and said, “This time I will praise<sup>f</sup> 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!” <sup>2</sup> 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?” <sup>3</sup> 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.” <sup>4</sup> So she gave him her maid Bilhah as a wife; and Jacob went in to her. <sup>5</sup> And Bilhah conceived and bore Jacob a son. <sup>6</sup> Then Rachel said, “God has judged me, and has also heard my voice and given me a son”; therefore she

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *him*

<sup>c</sup> That is *See, a son*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *shama*

<sup>e</sup> Heb *lawah*

<sup>f</sup> Heb *hodah*

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 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 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.

named him Dan.<sup>a</sup> <sup>7</sup> Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. <sup>8</sup> Then Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I have wrestled<sup>b</sup> with my sister, and have prevailed"; so she named him Naphtali.

<sup>9</sup> When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing children, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. <sup>10</sup> Then Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. <sup>11</sup> And Leah said, "Good fortune!" so she named him Gad.<sup>c</sup> <sup>12</sup> Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. <sup>13</sup> And Leah said, "Happy am I! For the women will call me happy"; so she named him Asher.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 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." <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And God heeded Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. <sup>18</sup> Leah said, "God has given me my hire<sup>e</sup> because I gave my maid to my husband"; so she named him Issachar. <sup>19</sup> And Leah conceived again, and she bore Jacob a sixth son. <sup>20</sup> Then Leah said, "God has endowed me with a good dowry; now my husband will honor<sup>f</sup> me, because I have borne him six sons"; so she named him Zebulun. <sup>21</sup> Afterwards she bore a daughter, and named her Dinah.

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

<sup>25</sup> When Rachel had borne Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away, that I may

go to my own home and country. <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> 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; <sup>28</sup> name your wages, and I will give it." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said to him, "You yourself know how I have served you, and how your cattle have fared with me. <sup>30</sup> 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?" <sup>31</sup> 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: <sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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." <sup>34</sup> Laban said, "Good! Let it be as you have said." <sup>35</sup> 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; <sup>36</sup> and he set a distance of three days' journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob was pasturing the rest of Laban's flock.

<sup>37</sup> Then Jacob took fresh rods of poplar and almond and plane, and peeled white streaks in them, exposing the white of the rods. <sup>38</sup> He

<sup>a</sup> That is *He judged*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *niphthal*

<sup>c</sup> That is *Fortune*

<sup>d</sup> That is *Happy*

<sup>e</sup> Heb *sakar*

<sup>f</sup> Heb *zabal*

<sup>g</sup> That is *He adds*

**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, thereby outwitting Laban.



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, <sup>39</sup> the flocks bred in front of the rods, and so the flocks produced young that were striped, speckled, and spotted. <sup>40</sup> 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 own droves apart, and did not put them with Laban's flock. <sup>41</sup> 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, <sup>42</sup> but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's. <sup>43</sup> 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." <sup>2</sup> And Jacob saw that Laban did not regard him as favorably as he did before. <sup>3</sup> Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Return to the land of your ancestors and to your kindred, and I will be with you." <sup>4</sup> So Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah into the field where his flock was, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> You know that I have served your father with all my strength; <sup>7</sup> yet your father has cheated me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not permit him to harm me. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Thus God has taken away the livestock of your father, and given them to me.

<sup>10</sup> "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. <sup>11</sup> Then the angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob,' and I said, 'Here I am!' <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> I am the God of Bethel,<sup>a</sup> 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.'" <sup>14</sup> Then Rachel and Leah answered him, "Is there any portion or inheritance left to us in our father's house? <sup>15</sup> Are we not regarded by him as foreigners? For he has sold us, and he has been using up the money given for us. <sup>16</sup> 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."

<sup>17</sup> So Jacob arose, and set his children and his wives on camels; <sup>18</sup> 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.

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

<sup>22</sup> On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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."

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> 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 (Pss 9.12; 135.21), God claims in this text to be "the god of Bethel" (see 28.10–11n.). This probably reflects the 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 27.1–45n.).

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Laban said to Jacob, “What have you done? You have deceived me, and carried away my daughters like captives of the sword. <sup>27</sup> Why did you flee secretly and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you away with mirth and songs, with tambourine and lyre. <sup>28</sup> And why did you not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters farewell? What you have done is foolish. <sup>29</sup> 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.” <sup>30</sup> Even though you had to go because you longed greatly for your father’s house, why did you steal my gods?” <sup>31</sup> Jacob answered Laban, “Because I was afraid, for I thought that you would take your daughters from me by force. <sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>35</sup> 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.

<sup>36</sup> 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? <sup>37</sup> Although you have felt about through all my goods, what have you found of all your household gods? Set it here before my kinsfolk and your kinsfolk, so that they may decide between us two. <sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> 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. <sup>40</sup> It was like this with me: by day the heat consumed me, and the cold by night, and my sleep fled from my eyes. <sup>41</sup> 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. <sup>42</sup> If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear<sup>b</sup> 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.”

<sup>43</sup> 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?

<sup>44</sup> Come now, let us make a covenant, you and I; and let it be a witness between you and me.”

<sup>45</sup> So Jacob took a stone, and set it up as a pillar. <sup>46</sup> And Jacob said to his kinsfolk, “Gather stones,” and they took stones, and made a heap; and they ate there by the heap. <sup>47</sup> Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha:<sup>c</sup> but Jacob called it Galeed.<sup>d</sup> <sup>48</sup> Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” Therefore he called it Galeed, <sup>49</sup> and the pillar<sup>e</sup> Mizpah,<sup>f</sup> for he said, “The LORD watch between you and me, when we are absent one from the other.

<sup>50</sup> If you ill-treat my daughters, or if you take

<sup>a</sup> Heb *them*

<sup>b</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>c</sup> In Aramaic *The heap of witness*

<sup>d</sup> In Hebrew *The heap of witness*

<sup>e</sup> Compare Sam: MT lacks *the pillar*

<sup>f</sup> That is *Watchpost*

**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 “kin” 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. 239). 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).

wives in addition to my daughters, though no one else is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me.”

<sup>51</sup> Then Laban said to Jacob, “See this heap and see the pillar, which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup> 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. <sup>53</sup> May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor”—the God of their father—”judge between us.” So Jacob swore by the Fear<sup>a</sup> of his father Isaac, <sup>54</sup> 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.

<sup>55</sup><sup>b</sup> 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; <sup>2</sup> and when Jacob saw them he said, “This is God’s camp!” So he called that place Mahanaim.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jacob sent messengers before him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, <sup>4</sup> 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; <sup>5</sup> 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.’”

<sup>6</sup> 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.” <sup>7</sup> 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, <sup>8</sup> thinking, “If Esau comes to the one company and destroys it, then the company that is left will escape.”

<sup>9</sup> 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,’ <sup>10</sup> 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.

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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.’”

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

<sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> 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?’ <sup>18</sup> 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.’” <sup>19</sup> 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, <sup>20</sup> 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

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Ch 32.1 in Heb

<sup>c</sup> Here taken to mean *Two camps*

<sup>53</sup>: *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. 28 ) is said to have been a capital of the Northern Kingdom during the brief reign of Ishbaal, Saul’s heir (2 Sam 2.8–9); and is later associated with David’s flight from Jerusalem 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

will accept me.”<sup>21</sup> So the present passed on ahead of him; and he himself spent that night in the camp.

<sup>22</sup>The same night he got up and took his two wives, his two maids, and his eleven children, and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.<sup>23</sup> He took them and sent them across the stream, and likewise everything that he had.<sup>24</sup> Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> Then he said, “Let me go, for the day is breaking.” But Jacob said, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”<sup>27</sup> So he said to him, “What is your name?” And he said, “Jacob.”<sup>28</sup> Then the man<sup>a</sup> said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,<sup>b</sup> for you have striven with God and with humans,<sup>c</sup> and have prevailed.”<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Peniel,<sup>d</sup> saying, “For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.”<sup>31</sup> The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> He put the

maids with their children in front, then Leah with her children, and Rachel and Joseph last of all.<sup>3</sup> He himself went on ahead of them, bowing himself to the ground seven times, until he came near his brother.

<sup>4</sup>But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept.<sup>5</sup> 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.”<sup>6</sup> Then the maids drew near, they and their children, and bowed down;<sup>7</sup> Leah likewise and her children drew near and bowed down; and finally Joseph and Rachel drew near, and they bowed down.<sup>8</sup> Esau said, “What do you mean by all this company that I met?” Jacob answered, “To find favor with my lord.”<sup>9</sup> But Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; keep what you have for yourself.”<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup>Then Esau said, “Let us journey on our way, and I will go alongside you.”<sup>13</sup> But Jacob

<sup>a</sup> Heb *he*

<sup>b</sup> That is *The one who strives with God* or *God strives*

<sup>c</sup> Or *with divine and human beings*

<sup>d</sup> That is *The face of God*

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 fights with God (cf. Ex 4.24–26). The narrative includes a complicated wordplay on the names of Jacob (Heb “yaabeq”; v. 24); see also 25.26n. **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—an ancient folkloristic theme marking 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*, (Heb *Yisra’el*) (35.10), which probably originally meant “El rules” (the god El was the head of the Canaanite pantheon). Here, however, it is interpreted to mean “the one who strives [Heb “sarah”] 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; cf. 2.19–20n. **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); it serves as an etiology, an explanation for that site’s choice. **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 him

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. <sup>14</sup>Let my lord pass on ahead of his servant, 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.”

<sup>15</sup>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?” <sup>16</sup>So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir. <sup>17</sup>But Jacob journeyed to Succoth,<sup>a</sup> and built himself a house, and made booths for his cattle; therefore the place is called Succoth.

<sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>And from the sons of Hamor, Shechem’s father, he bought for one hundred pieces of money<sup>b</sup> the plot of land on which he had pitched his tent. <sup>20</sup>There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel.<sup>c</sup>

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

<sup>5</sup>Now Jacob heard that Shechem<sup>d</sup> had defiled his daughter Dinah; but his sons

were with his cattle in the field, so Jacob held his peace until they came. <sup>6</sup>And Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him, <sup>7</sup>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.

<sup>8</sup>But Hamor spoke with them, saying, “The heart of my son Shechem longs for your daughter; please give her to him in marriage. <sup>9</sup>Make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves. <sup>10</sup>You shall live with us; and the land shall be open to you; live and trade in it, and get property in it.” <sup>11</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>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.”

<sup>13</sup>The sons of Jacob answered Shechem and his father Hamor deceitfully, because he had defiled their sister Dinah. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Only on this condition will we consent to you: that you will become as we are and every male among you be circumcised. <sup>16</sup>Then we will

<sup>a</sup> That is *Booths*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *one hundred qesitah*

<sup>c</sup> That is *God, the God of Israel*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *he*

later (v. 14); Jacob does not do so, however (v. 17), perhaps noting that Esau had always planned to wait 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 the Canaanite deity 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 49.5–7n. 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 a proverbial 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 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 people of Israel. 13–17: Jacob’s sons now are the tricksters (see 27.1–45n.). On circumcision



give our daughters to you, and we will take your daughters for ourselves, and we will live among you and become one people. <sup>17</sup> But if you will not listen to us and be circumcised, then we will take our daughter and be gone.”

<sup>18</sup> Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. <sup>19</sup> And the young man did not delay to do the thing, because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most honored of all his family. <sup>20</sup> So Hamor and his son Shechem came to the gate of their city and spoke to the men of their city, saying, <sup>21</sup> “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. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> Will not their livestock, their property, and all their animals be ours? Only let us agree with them, and they will live among us.” <sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> They killed Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away. <sup>27</sup> And the other sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and plundered the city, because their sister had been defiled. <sup>28</sup> They took their flocks

and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. <sup>29</sup> All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and made their prey. <sup>30</sup> 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.” <sup>31</sup> 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.” <sup>2</sup> 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; <sup>3</sup> 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.” <sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> As they journeyed, a terror from God fell upon the cities all around them, so that no one pursued them. <sup>6</sup> Jacob came to Luz (that is, Bethel), which is in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him, <sup>7</sup> and there he built an altar and called the place El-bethel, <sup>8</sup> because it was there that God had

<sup>a</sup> That is *God of Bethel*

see 17.9–14n., though the practice of adult circumcision is proposed here as part of a vengeful ruse. **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). **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* (see 28.10–22). **6–7:** Deities often had local manifestations (e.g., on ancient inscriptions we find “Yahweh of Samaria” and “Yahweh of Teman”). Jacob honors the local manifestation of El at Bethel

revealed himself to him when he fled from his brother.<sup>8</sup> And Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died, and she was buried under an oak below Bethel. So it was called Allon-bacuth.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>9</sup> God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and he blessed him.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> God said to him, "I am God Almighty:<sup>b</sup> be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall spring from you.<sup>12</sup> 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."<sup>13</sup> Then God went up from him at the place where he had spoken with him.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> So Jacob called the place where God had spoken with him Bethel.

<sup>16</sup> Then they journeyed from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor.<sup>17</sup> When she was in her hard labor, the midwife said to her, "Do not be afraid; for now you will have another son."<sup>18</sup> As her soul was departing (for she died), she named him Ben-oni;<sup>c</sup> but his father called him Benjamin.<sup>d</sup><sup>19</sup> So Rachel died, and she was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethle-

hem),<sup>20</sup> and Jacob set up a pillar at her grave; it is the pillar of Rachel's tomb, which is there to this day.<sup>21</sup> Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder.

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> The sons of Leah: Reuben (Jacob's firstborn), Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

<sup>24</sup> The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

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

<sup>27</sup> Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had resided as aliens.<sup>28</sup> Now the days of Isaac were one hundred eighty years.<sup>29</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> Esau took his wives from the Canaanites: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah daughter of Anah

<sup>a</sup> That is *Oak of weeping*

<sup>b</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

<sup>c</sup> That is *Son of my sorrow*

<sup>d</sup> That is *Son of the right hand* or *Son of the South*

by building an altar there and calling the sanctuary "El of Bethel." **8:** Once again a tree is associated with a revered sanctuary (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 permanently 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 *d*) 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, but not exclusively, 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 49.8–12n.), 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

son<sup>a</sup> of Zibeon the Hivite,<sup>3</sup> and Basemath, Ishmael's daughter, sister of Nebaioth.<sup>4</sup> Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau; Basemath bore Reuel;<sup>5</sup> and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These are the sons of Esau who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

<sup>6</sup>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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir; Esau is Edom.

<sup>9</sup>These are the descendants of Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir.<sup>10</sup> These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz son of Adah the wife of Esau; Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath.<sup>11</sup> The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz.<sup>12</sup> (Timna was a concubine of Eliphaz, Esau's son; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz.) These were the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.<sup>13</sup> These were the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. These were the sons of Esau's wife, Basemath.<sup>14</sup> These were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah son<sup>b</sup> of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

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

Jalam, and Korah; these are the clans<sup>c</sup> born of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah.<sup>19</sup> These are the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these are their clans.<sup>c</sup>

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

<sup>31</sup>These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom, before any king reigned over the Israelites.<sup>32</sup> Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, the name of his city being Dinhabah.<sup>33</sup> Bela died, and Jobab son of Zerah of Bozrah succeeded him as king.<sup>34</sup> Jobab died, and Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Hadad

<sup>a</sup> Sam Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*

<sup>b</sup> Gk Syr: Heb *daughter*

<sup>c</sup> Or *chiefs*

<sup>d</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>e</sup> Or *chief by chief*

in stressing his intermarriage with foreigners, the names or parentage of Esau's wives are different here (cf. 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. Deuteronomy 2.12,22 describes Esau (Edom) as having expelled the Horites from Seir. 31–39: A 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.



died, and Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king.<sup>37</sup> Samlah died, and Shaul of Rehoboth on the Euphrates succeeded him as king.<sup>38</sup> Shaul died, and Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as king.<sup>39</sup> 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.

<sup>40</sup>These are the names of the clans<sup>a</sup> of Esau, according to their families and their localities by their names: the clans<sup>a</sup> Timna, Alvah, Jetheth,<sup>41</sup> Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon,<sup>42</sup> Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar,<sup>43</sup> Magdiel, and Iram; these are the clans<sup>a</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> This is the story of the family of Jacob.

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>b</sup> <sup>4</sup> 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.

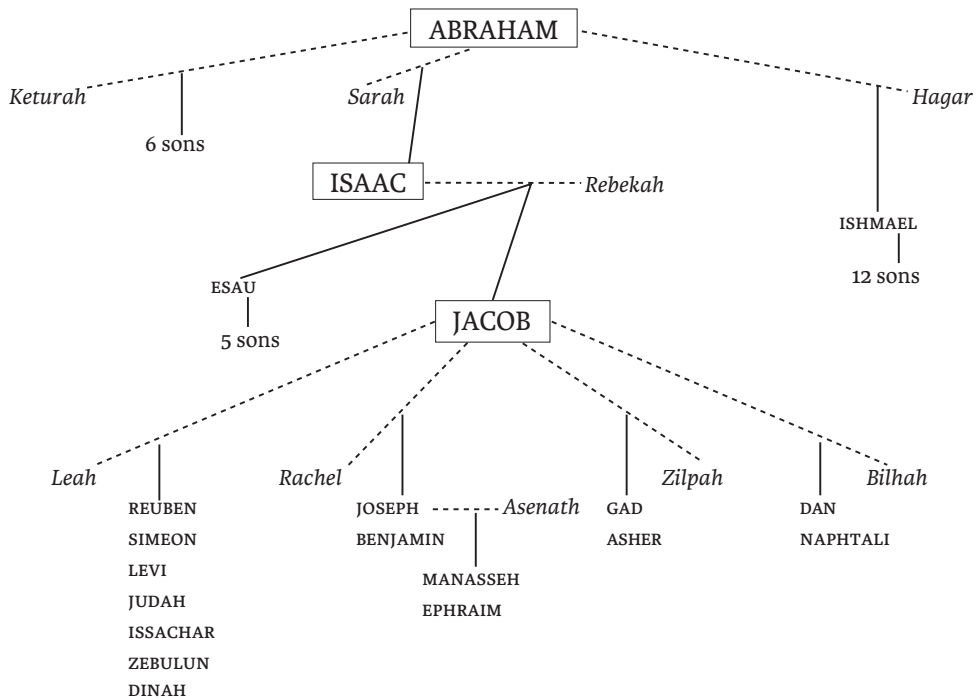
<sup>5</sup> Once Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him even more. <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "Listen to this dream that I dreamed. <sup>7</sup> There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright; then your sheaves gathered around it, and bowed down to my sheaf." <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>a</sup> Or *chiefs*

<sup>b</sup> Traditional rendering (compare Gk): *a coat of many colors*; meaning of Heb uncertain

**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). Joseph was a prominent northern tribe, and 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 49:8–12n.), 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 Elo-histic 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, 28; 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, which brings unity to Genesis, 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; but 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



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

<sup>9</sup> 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.” <sup>10</sup> 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?” <sup>11</sup> So his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

<sup>12</sup> Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> 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, <sup>15</sup> and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” <sup>16</sup> “I am seeking my brothers,” he said; “tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” <sup>17</sup> 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.

<sup>18</sup> They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them, they conspired to kill him. <sup>19</sup> They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. <sup>20</sup> 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

the 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 rainwater and sometimes used to imprison

we shall see what will become of his dreams.”<sup>21</sup> But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.”<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the long robe with sleeves<sup>a</sup> that he wore;<sup>24</sup> and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> Then Judah said to his brothers, “What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood?<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes.<sup>30</sup> He returned to his brothers, and said, “The boy is gone; and I, where

can I turn?”<sup>31</sup> Then they took Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat, and dipped the robe in the blood.<sup>32</sup> They had the long robe with sleeves<sup>a</sup> taken to their father, and they said, “This we have found; see now whether it is your son’s robe or not.”<sup>33</sup> He recognized it, and said, “It is my son’s robe! A wild animal has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces.”<sup>34</sup> Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her.<sup>3</sup> She conceived and bore a son; and he named him Er.<sup>4</sup> Again she conceived and bore a son whom she named Onan.<sup>5</sup> Yet again she bore a son, and she named him Shelah. She<sup>b</sup> was in Chezib

<sup>a</sup> See note on 37:3

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb *He*

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. **28:** The first half of this verse (possibly an insertion) displaces blame for the actual sale to passing Midianites (cf. Gen 37.27; 45.4–5). **31–34:** Now Jacob is tricked by an article of clothing (contrast 27.15; see 29.23–25n.). **35:** *Sheol*, the underworld to which everyone 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 further reflects his misery. **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 associated with David’s 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’a,” v. 12), anticipates the later “Bathsheba” of the David and

when she bore him. <sup>6</sup> Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn; her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup> But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the LORD, and the LORD put him to death. <sup>8</sup> 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."

<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> What he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he put him to death also. <sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; when Judah's time of mourning was over,<sup>a</sup> he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. <sup>13</sup> When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a prostitute, for she had covered her face. <sup>16</sup> He went over to her at 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?" <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> Then she got up and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

<sup>20</sup> When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he could not find her. <sup>21</sup> He asked the townspeople, "Where is the temple prostitute who was at Enaim by the wayside?" But they said, "No prostitute has been here." <sup>22</sup> So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; moreover the townspeople said, 'No prostitute has been here.'" <sup>23</sup> 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."

<sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. <sup>28</sup> While she

<sup>a</sup> Heb when Judah was comforted

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* of his brother's childless widow was to impregnate her and thus perpetuate his brother's name and inheritance through his widow's offspring. Onan's death is attributed to his refusal to perform this duty of impregnating Er's widow, Tamar, 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 impregnating her 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 the institution of sacred prostitution existed in ancient Israel. Perhaps 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

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.”<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>a</sup> <sup>30</sup> Afterward his brother came out with the crimson thread on his hand; and he was named Zerah.<sup>b</sup>

**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.<sup>2</sup> The LORD was with Joseph, and he became a successful man; he was in the house of his Egyptian master.<sup>3</sup> His master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hands.<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> And after a time his master’s wife cast her eyes on Joseph and said, “Lie with me.”<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> He is not greater in this house than I am, nor has he kept back anything from me except yourself, because you are his wife. How then could I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”<sup>10</sup> And although she spoke to Joseph day after day, he would not

consent to lie beside her or to be with her.<sup>11</sup> One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house,<sup>12</sup> she caught hold of his garment, saying, “Lie with me!” But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside.<sup>13</sup> When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside,<sup>14</sup> she called out to the members of her household and said to them, “See, my husband<sup>c</sup> 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;<sup>15</sup> and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”<sup>16</sup> Then she kept his garment by her until his master came home,<sup>17</sup> and she told him the same story, saying, “The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us, came in to me to insult me;<sup>18</sup> but as soon as I raised my voice and cried out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.”

<sup>19</sup> When his master heard the words that his wife spoke to him, saying, “This is the way your servant treated me,” he became enraged.<sup>20</sup> And 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.<sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and showed him steadfast love; he gave him favor in the sight of the chief jailer.<sup>22</sup> The 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.<sup>23</sup> The 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.

<sup>a</sup> That is *A breach*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Brightness*; perhaps alluding to the crimson thread

<sup>c</sup> Heb *he*

(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 49.1–28n. 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 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** Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker offended their lord the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, <sup>3</sup>and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. <sup>4</sup>The captain of the guard charged Joseph with them, and he waited on them; and they continued for some time in custody. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. <sup>7</sup>So he asked Pharaoh’s officers, who were with him in custody in his master’s house, “Why are your faces downcast today?” <sup>8</sup>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.”

<sup>9</sup>So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, “In my dream there was a vine before me, <sup>10</sup>and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms came out and the clusters ripened into grapes. <sup>11</sup>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.” <sup>12</sup>Then Joseph said to him, “This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days; <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>For in fact I was stolen out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also I have done nothing that they should have put me into the dungeon.”

<sup>16</sup>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, <sup>17</sup>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.” <sup>18</sup>And Joseph answered, “This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; <sup>19</sup>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.”

<sup>20</sup>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. <sup>21</sup>He restored the chief cupbearer to his cupbearing, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh’s hand; <sup>22</sup>but the chief baker he hanged, just as Joseph had interpreted to them. <sup>23</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>and there came up out of the Nile seven sleek and fat cows, and they grazed in the reed grass. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>The ugly and thin cows ate up the seven sleek and fat cows. And Pharaoh awoke. <sup>5</sup>Then he fell asleep and dreamed a second time; seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. <sup>6</sup>Then seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them. <sup>7</sup>The thin ears swallowed up the seven plump and full ears. Pharaoh awoke, and it was a dream. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “I remember my faults today. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>We dreamed on the same night, he and I, each

**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.

**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, anticipating the plague narrative in



having a dream with its own meaning.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> As he interpreted to us, so it turned out; I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged.”

<sup>14</sup>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.

<sup>15</sup>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.”<sup>16</sup> Joseph answered Pharaoh, “It is not I; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer.”<sup>17</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the banks of the Nile;<sup>18</sup> and seven cows, fat and sleek, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> The thin and ugly cows ate up the first seven fat cows,<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> I fell asleep a second time<sup>a</sup> and I saw in my dream seven ears of grain, full and good, growing on one stalk,<sup>23</sup> and seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouting after them;<sup>24</sup> 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.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Pharaoh’s dreams are one and the same; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.<sup>26</sup> The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one.<sup>27</sup> 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 famine.<sup>28</sup> It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.<sup>29</sup> There will come seven years of great plenty

throughout all the land of Egypt.<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> The plenty will no longer be known in the land because of the famine that will follow, for it will be very grievous.<sup>32</sup> And the doubling of Pharaoh’s dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.<sup>33</sup> Now therefore let Pharaoh select a man who is discerning and wise, and set him over the land of Egypt.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> 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.”

<sup>37</sup>The proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.<sup>38</sup> Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find anyone else like this—one in whom is the spirit of God?”<sup>39</sup> So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you.<sup>40</sup> 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.”<sup>41</sup> And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> He had him ride in the chariot of his second-in-command; and they tried out in front of him, “Bow the knee!”<sup>b</sup> Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt.<sup>44</sup> 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.”<sup>45</sup> Pharaoh gave Joseph

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Vg: Heb lacks *I fell asleep a second time*

<sup>b</sup> *Abrek*, apparently an Egyptian word similar in sound to the Hebrew word meaning *to kneel*

Exodus ( Ex 8.18–19; 9.11; cf. Dan 2.2–19; 5.8,15–28). 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

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.

<sup>46</sup> 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. <sup>47</sup> During the seven plenteous years the earth produced abundantly. <sup>48</sup> He gathered up all the food of the seven years when there was plenty<sup>a</sup> 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. <sup>49</sup> So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance—like the sand of the sea—that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure.

<sup>50</sup> Before the years of famine came, Joseph had two sons, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. <sup>51</sup> Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh,<sup>b</sup> “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” <sup>52</sup> The second he named Ephraim,<sup>c</sup> “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my misfortunes.”

<sup>53</sup> The seven years of plenty that prevailed in the land of Egypt came to an end; <sup>54</sup> 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. <sup>55</sup> 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.” <sup>56</sup> And since the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses,<sup>d</sup> and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. <sup>57</sup> 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?

<sup>2</sup> I 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.” <sup>3</sup> So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. <sup>4</sup> But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he feared that harm might come to him. <sup>5</sup> Thus the sons of Israel were among the other people who came to buy grain, for the famine had reached the land of Canaan.

<sup>6</sup> Now 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. <sup>7</sup> 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.” <sup>8</sup> Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup> 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!” <sup>10</sup> They said to him, “No, my lord; your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup> We are all sons of one man; we are honest men; your servants have never been spies.” <sup>12</sup> But he said to them, “No, you have come to see the nakedness of the land!” <sup>13</sup> 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.” <sup>14</sup> But Joseph said to them, “It is just as I have said to you; you are spies! <sup>15</sup> Here is how you shall be tested: as

<sup>a</sup> Sam Gk: MT *the seven years that were*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Making to forget*

<sup>c</sup> From a Hebrew word meaning *to be fruitful*

<sup>d</sup> Gk Vg Compare Syr: Heb *opened all that was in (or, among) them*

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.

**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



Pharaoh lives, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here!

<sup>16</sup>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.”<sup>17</sup> And he put them all together in prison for three days.

<sup>18</sup>On the third day Joseph said to them, “Do this and you will live, for I fear God: <sup>19</sup>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, <sup>20</sup>and bring your youngest brother to me. Thus your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they agreed to do so. <sup>21</sup>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.” <sup>22</sup>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.” <sup>23</sup>They did not know that Joseph understood them, since he spoke with them through an interpreter. <sup>24</sup>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. <sup>25</sup>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.

<sup>26</sup>They loaded their donkeys with their grain, and departed. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in my sack!” At this they lost heart and turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

<sup>29</sup>When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, <sup>30</sup>“The man, the lord of the land, spoke harshly to us, and charged us with spying on the land. <sup>31</sup>But we said to him, ‘We are honest men, we are not spies. <sup>32</sup>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.’ <sup>33</sup>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. <sup>34</sup>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.’”

<sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>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!” <sup>37</sup>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.” <sup>38</sup>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. <sup>2</sup>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.”<sup>3</sup> But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us, saying, ‘You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.’<sup>4</sup> If you will send our brother with

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 of heart for which Joseph is looking. **25:** *Money*, lit., “silver”; money in the sense of minted currency was introduced only in the Persian period. **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

us, we will go down and buy you food; <sup>5</sup> 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.’” <sup>6</sup> Israel said, “Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?” <sup>7</sup> 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?’” <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice.”

<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Take your brother also, and be on your way again to the man; <sup>14</sup> may God Almighty<sup>a</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> 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.” <sup>17</sup> The man did as Joseph said, and brought the men to Joseph’s house. <sup>18</sup> Now the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph’s house, and they

said, “It is because of the money, replaced in 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.” <sup>19</sup> So they went up to the steward of Joseph’s house and spoke with him at the entrance to the house. <sup>20</sup> They said, “Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food; <sup>21</sup> 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. <sup>22</sup> Moreover we have brought down with us additional money to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks.” <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> When the steward<sup>b</sup> 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, <sup>25</sup> they made the present ready for Joseph’s coming at noon, for they had heard that they would dine there.

<sup>26</sup> When Joseph came home, they brought him the present that they had carried into the house, and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>27</sup> He inquired about their welfare, and said, “Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?” <sup>28</sup> They said, “Your servant our father is well; he is still alive.” And they bowed their heads and did obeisance. <sup>29</sup> 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!” <sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> Then he washed his face and came out; and controlling himself he said, “Serve the meal.”

<sup>a</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *the man*

(see 37.26–27) Judah is depicted as the hero; see 44.18–34n. 11: Balm . . . gum, and resin, echoing 37.25. 14: God 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

<sup>32</sup> 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. <sup>33</sup> 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. <sup>34</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup> 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?'<sup>a</sup> <sup>5</sup> Is it not from this that my lord drinks? Does he not indeed use it for divination? You have done wrong in doing this.'"

<sup>6</sup> When he overtook them, he repeated these words to them. <sup>7</sup> They said to him, "Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants that they should do such a thing!" <sup>8</sup> Look, 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? <sup>9</sup> Should it be found with any one of your servants, let him die; moreover the rest of us will become my lord's slaves." <sup>10</sup> He 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." <sup>11</sup> Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each opened his sack. <sup>12</sup> He searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest; and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. <sup>13</sup> At this they tore their clothes. Then each one loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

<sup>14</sup> Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house while he was still there; and they fell to the ground before him. <sup>15</sup> Joseph said to them, "What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that one such as I can practice divination?" <sup>16</sup> And 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." <sup>17</sup> But 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."

<sup>18</sup> Then 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

<sup>a</sup> Gk Compare Vg: Heb lacks *Why have you stolen my silver cup?*

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, 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 eldest

himself. <sup>19</sup> My lord asked his servants, saying, 'Have you a father or a brother?' <sup>20</sup> And 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.' <sup>21</sup> Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me, so that I may set my eyes on him.' <sup>22</sup> We said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.' <sup>23</sup> Then you said to your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall see my face no more.' <sup>24</sup> When we went back to your servant my father we told him the words of my lord. <sup>25</sup> And when our father said, 'Go again, buy us a little food,' <sup>26</sup> we 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.' <sup>27</sup> Then your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me two sons; <sup>28</sup> one left me, and I said, Surely he has been torn to pieces; and I have never seen him since. <sup>29</sup> If you take this one also from me, and harm comes to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in sorrow to Sheol.' <sup>30</sup> Now 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, <sup>31</sup> when 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. <sup>32</sup> For your servant became surety 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.' <sup>33</sup> Now 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. <sup>34</sup> For 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 from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. <sup>2</sup> And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. <sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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.' <sup>12</sup> And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> Then he fell upon

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 a Northern text) to show even Judah, King David's ancestor, eventually recognizing Joseph's right to rule over his brothers.

**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.

his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck.<sup>15</sup> And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

<sup>16</sup>When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, "Joseph's brothers have come," Pharaoh and his servants were pleased.<sup>17</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan.<sup>18</sup> 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.'<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

<sup>21</sup>The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey.<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, "Do not quarrel<sup>a</sup> along the way."

<sup>25</sup>So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan.<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am."<sup>3</sup> Then he said, "I am God,<sup>b</sup> the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there.<sup>4</sup> I 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."

<sup>5</sup>Then 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.<sup>6</sup> They 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,<sup>7</sup> his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn,<sup>9</sup> and the children of Reuben: Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.<sup>10</sup> The children of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,<sup>c</sup> the son of a Canaanite woman.<sup>11</sup> The children of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.<sup>12</sup> The 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.<sup>13</sup> The children of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Jashub,<sup>d</sup> and Shimron.<sup>14</sup> The children of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel<sup>15</sup> (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).<sup>16</sup> The children of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.<sup>17</sup> The children of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah.

<sup>a</sup> Or *be agitated*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *the God*

<sup>c</sup> Or *Saul*

<sup>d</sup> Compare Sam Gk Num 26.24; 1 Chr 7.1: MT *Iob*

**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 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.



The children of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel<sup>18</sup> (these are the children of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons).<sup>19</sup> The children of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.<sup>20</sup> To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him.<sup>21</sup> The children of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppm, Huppm, and Ard.<sup>22</sup> (these are the children of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all).<sup>23</sup> The children of Dan: Hashum.<sup>24</sup> The children of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.<sup>25</sup> (these are the children of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all).<sup>26</sup> All 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.<sup>27</sup> The 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.

<sup>28</sup> Israel<sup>b</sup> sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen,<sup>29</sup> Joseph 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.<sup>30</sup> Israel said to Joseph, "I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive."<sup>31</sup> Joseph 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.'<sup>32</sup> The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.'

<sup>33</sup> When Pharaoh calls you, and says, 'What is your occupation?'<sup>34</sup> you 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."

**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."<sup>2</sup> From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh.<sup>3</sup> Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were."<sup>4</sup> 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."<sup>5</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you."<sup>6</sup> 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."

<sup>7</sup> Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob, and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?"<sup>9</sup> 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."<sup>10</sup> Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *Hushim*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *He*

**46.28–47.28: Jacob's family settles in Egypt.** **46.34:** *All shepherds are abhorrent*, no nonbiblical evidence supports 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 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>16</sup> And Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." <sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> 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."

<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> As for the people, he made slaves of them<sup>a</sup> from one end of Egypt to the other. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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. <sup>24</sup> 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."

<sup>25</sup> They said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh."

<sup>26</sup> So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth. The land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> 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." <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," he<sup>b</sup> summoned his strength and sat up in bed. <sup>3</sup> And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty<sup>c</sup> appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, <sup>4</sup> 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

<sup>a</sup> Sam Gk Compare Vg: MT *He removed them to the cities*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *Israel*

<sup>c</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

**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 in Exodus. **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.

for a perpetual holding.’<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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).

<sup>8</sup> When Israel saw Joseph’s sons, he said, “Who are these?”<sup>9</sup> 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.”<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> Israel said to Joseph, “I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also.”<sup>12</sup> Then Joseph removed them from his father’s knees,<sup>a</sup> and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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.<sup>15</sup> He blessed Joseph, and said,

“The God before whom my ancestors  
Abraham and Isaac walked,  
the God who has been my shepherd all my  
life to this day,

<sup>16</sup> 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.”

<sup>17</sup> 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.<sup>18</sup> Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.”<sup>19</sup> 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.”<sup>20</sup> So he blessed them that day, saying,

“By you<sup>b</sup> Israel will invoke blessings,  
saying,  
‘God make you<sup>b</sup> like Ephraim and like  
Manasseh.’”

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> I now give to you one portion<sup>c</sup> more than to your brothers, the portion<sup>c</sup> that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.”

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

<sup>a</sup> Heb *from his knees*

<sup>b</sup> you here is singular in Heb

<sup>c</sup> Or *mountain slope* (Heb *shekem*, a play on the name of the town and district of Shechem)

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 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



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

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

<sup>4</sup> Unstable as water, you shall no longer  
excel  
because you went up onto your father's  
bed;  
then you defiled it—you<sup>a</sup> went up onto  
my couch!

<sup>5</sup> Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
weapons of violence are their swords.

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,  
and their wrath, for it is cruel!  
I will divide them in Jacob,  
and scatter them in Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
your hand shall be on the neck of your  
enemies;  
your father's sons shall bow down  
before you.

<sup>9</sup> Judah 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?

<sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler's staff from between his  
feet,

until tribute comes to him;<sup>b</sup>  
and the obedience of the peoples is his.

<sup>11</sup> Binding 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;

<sup>12</sup> his eyes are darker than wine,  
and his teeth whiter than milk.

<sup>13</sup> Zebulun shall settle at the shore of the  
sea;

he shall be a haven for ships,  
and his border shall be at Sidon.

<sup>14</sup> Issachar is a strong donkey,  
lying down between the sheepfolds;

<sup>15</sup> he 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.

<sup>16</sup> Dan shall judge his people  
as one of the tribes of Israel.

<sup>17</sup> Dan shall be a snake by the roadside,  
a viper along the path,  
that bites the horse's heels  
so that its rider falls backward.

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr Tg: Heb *he*

<sup>b</sup> Or *until Shiloh comes* or *until he comes to Shiloh* or  
(with Syr) *until he comes to whom it belongs*

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 other supposedly ancient 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 three older sons: Amnon (2 Sam 13), Absalom (2 Sam 15–18), and Adonijah (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 *b*). It appears to predict rule for Judean royalty (Num 24.17; Pss 2, 110). 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*

- <sup>18</sup> I wait for your salvation, O LORD.
- <sup>19</sup> Gad shall be raided by raiders,  
but he shall raid at their heels.
- <sup>20</sup> Asher's<sup>a</sup> food shall be rich,  
and he shall provide royal delicacies.
- <sup>21</sup> Naphtali is a doe let loose  
that bears lovely fawns.<sup>b</sup>
- <sup>22</sup> Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
a fruitful bough by a spring;  
his branches run over the wall.<sup>c</sup>
- <sup>23</sup> The archers fiercely attacked him;  
they shot at him and pressed him hard.
- <sup>24</sup> Yet his bow remained taut,  
and his arms<sup>d</sup> were made agile  
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,  
by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock  
of Israel,  
<sup>25</sup> by the God of your father, who will help  
you,  
by the Almighty<sup>e</sup> who will bless you  
with blessings of heaven above,  
blessings of the deep that lies beneath,  
blessings of the breasts and of the  
womb.
- <sup>26</sup> The blessings of your father  
are stronger than the blessings of the  
eternal mountains,  
the bounties<sup>f</sup> of the everlasting hills;  
may they be on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of him who was set apart  
from his brothers.
- <sup>27</sup> Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,  
in the morning devouring the prey,  
and at evening dividing the spoil.”
- <sup>28</sup> All 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.

<sup>29</sup> Then 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,<sup>30</sup> 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.<sup>31</sup> There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—<sup>32</sup> the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites.”<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel;<sup>3</sup> they spent forty days in doing this, for that is the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

<sup>4</sup> 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:<sup>5</sup> 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.”

<sup>a</sup> Gk Vg Syr: Heb *From Asher*

<sup>b</sup> Or *that gives beautiful words*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>d</sup> Heb *the arms of his hands*

<sup>e</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *Shaddai*

<sup>f</sup> Cn Compare Gk: Heb *of my progenitors to the boundaries*

is derived from the Hebrew verb for “judge” (“dan”). **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.

**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 presupposes 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

<sup>6</sup> Pharaoh answered, “Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear to do.”

<sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> Both chariots and charioteers went up with him. It was a very great company. <sup>10</sup> When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father seven days. <sup>11</sup> 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;<sup>a</sup> it is beyond the Jordan. <sup>12</sup> Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> 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.

<sup>15</sup> 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?” <sup>16</sup> So they approached<sup>b</sup> Joseph, saying, “Your

father gave this instruction before he died, <sup>17</sup> ‘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. <sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also wept,<sup>c</sup> fell down before him, and said, “We are here as your slaves.” <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.” In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

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

<sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, “When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.” <sup>26</sup> And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

<sup>a</sup> That is *mourning* (or *meadow*) of Egypt

<sup>b</sup> Gk Syr: Heb *they commanded*

<sup>c</sup> Cn: Heb *also came*

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 to protect themselves by making up a report 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. **26:** The conclusion of Joseph’s life closely parallels the conclusion of Joshua’s life (Josh 24.29), and the burial of Joseph’s bones in the land just after Joshua’s death (24.32).

# EXODUS

## NAME

The English name “Exodus,” which derives from a Latinized abbreviation of the Greek title *exodos aigyptou* (“exit from Egypt”), highlights the storyline of the first third of the book. In keeping with the ancient practice of naming books after their opening words, the main Hebrew title is *Shemot* (“names”), taken from the book’s beginning (“These are the names”).

## CANONICAL STATUS AND LOCATION

The second book of the Bible in all canonical traditions, Exodus is not an independent work but rather is an integral part of the Torah, or Pentateuch. Its opening verses connect it to Gen 46.8–27; and it closes with the completion of the tabernacle, the wilderness shrine that prefigures the Temple as a dwelling for the divine presence. Details of worship at that shrine dominate the next book, Leviticus; and Numbers and Deuteronomy continue the journey narrative.

## AUTHORSHIP

Authorship is traditionally ascribed to Moses, in part based on passages such as 24.4 and 34.27. Modern biblical scholarship, however, has noted many problems with the view that Moses wrote the entire Torah, including Exodus. Like the rest of the Pentateuch, Exodus contains contradictions and redundancies. For example, Moses’s father-in-law is sometimes called Reuel and sometimes Jethro; and the mountain of revelation is Sinai in some passages and Horeb in others. The narratives of Moses on the mountain in chs 19 and 24 have many overlapping and conflicting details, as does the account of the calamities—called “ten plagues” in postbiblical tradition but not in the Bible—against the Egyptians in 7.8–10.29. Differences in vocabulary, style, and ideas are also evident. Thus Exodus is best understood as a composite of streams of traditions shaped over many centuries by an unknown number of anonymous storytellers and writers. Eventually those traditions—often labeled J, E, D, and P according to critical biblical scholarship—were skillfully combined into the present canonical book by one or more redactors or editors who accepted these multiple traditions as valid. The redactor(s) or editor(s) can be credited with the overall interweaving of disparate materials—narratives, legal texts, priestly records, lists, and one long poem. Redaction also introduced or maintained patterns, such as the repetition of a thematic word or phrase a symbolic number of times (usually seven or ten) in a literary unit (see, e.g., 4.21n.; 5.1n.; 18.26n.; 40.16n.), and also the triadic arrangement of the account of the nine marvels (see 7.8–10.29n.).

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The diverse materials in Exodus are situated within a story line describing the departure of a group of oppressed people from Egypt to a sacred mountain in Sinai where they enter into a covenant with the God they believed rescued them; then, at that God’s direction, they construct a portable shrine for their deity before continuing their journey. The historicity of that story has been questioned, partly because the literary strands comprising Exodus date from many centuries after the events they purport to describe. The events themselves, which involve the escape of a component of Pharaoh’s workforce, the disruption of Egyptian agriculture, and the loss of many Egyptian lives, are not mentioned in Egyptian sources (although the Egyptians would not necessarily record such events). Similarly, the larger-than-life leader Moses is not mentioned in contemporaneous nonbiblical sources; and no trace of a large group of people moving across the Sinai Peninsula has been found by archaeological surveys or excavations. In addition, features of the story—such as the signs and wonders performed in Egypt, the exceedingly large number of people said to have left Egypt (see 12.37n.), and the huge quantities of precious metals (e.g., ca. 2,482 pounds of gold; see 38.24) used to construct the tabernacle and other ritual objects—defy credibility. Virtually none of the places mentioned in Exodus, including the holy mountain, can be identified with sites discovered in Sinai or with names known from other sources (see 12.37n.; 19.1n.). Finally, the Exodus story culminates in the book of Joshua, with the conquest of the land of Israel; here too the archaeological record does not corroborate the main biblical narrative.

Despite these problems, the basic story line about the departure from Egypt fits broad evidence from Egyptian and other sources. Foreigners from western Asia, called “Asiatics” in Egyptian documents, periodically did migrate to Egypt, especially during times of famine (see Gen 12.10; 41.57; 43.1–2); others were taken to Egypt as military captives or were forcibly sent there as human tribute by Canaanite rulers. Moreover, many such groups, including those who voluntarily entered Egypt, were conscripted for state projects (see Ex 1.11–14). This pattern was especially strong toward the end of the Late Bronze Age (ca. 1400–1200 BCE). And, although virtually all of the foreigners in Egypt were assimilated into local culture, there is at least one documented instance of several workers escaping into the Sinai wilderness. Thus the overall pattern of descent into Egypt followed by servitude and escape accords with general information in ancient documents. In addition, the end of the Late Bronze Age, by which time the Israelites would have left Egypt, coincides with the date of inscriptional evidence—a stele erected by Pharaoh Merneptah in ca. 1209 BCE—for a people called “Israel” in the land of Canaan, the first mention of Israel outside the Bible.

A plausible reconstruction is that a relatively small group of people, descendants of western Asiatics who had entered Egypt generations before, managed to escape from servitude. So improbable was such an event that the people, or their leader, attributed it to miraculous divine intervention. This experience bonded them in their loyalty to that deity and gave them a collective identity. This story was originally oral and developed like other oral tales. Upon entering Canaan, they told their story and spread word about their unusual saving God, Yahweh, a name perhaps learned from Midianites with whom they interacted (see 3.15n.). Their stories about securing freedom are collective memories meant to re-create for others the intense emotional experience of liberation rather than to record accurate details of their escape. As time passed, major features of Israelite culture—such as the main agricultural festivals (especially passover), the custom of redeeming firstborn males, the idea of a people in a covenant relationship with God, prophets as transmitters of God’s word, the sabbath, the construction of a central shrine as God’s earthly abode, a sacrificial system administered by priests—were assimilated into the core Exodus narrative, which gave them emotional power and authority (see 11.1–13.16n.). This commemoration of the past makes the experience of a few the collective story, the very identity, of the community taking shape and expanding in the highlands of Canaan and later struggling to survive the traumas of division and exile.

#### LITERARY HISTORY

The components of the book of Exodus have been so skillfully woven together that it often is not possible to reconstruct the process by which they emerged and were ultimately combined. The overall story comprises several traditions, perhaps related to the southern (Judean) and northern (Israelite) E posited by biblical scholarship, that arose during the monarchic period, with the long poem of ch 15 likely an independent composition predating the narrative strands. Deuteronomic elements (D, usually linked to late monarchic developments) can also be identified; it is even possible that all three streams of tradition drew from a core commemorative account but developed it in their own particular ways. A strong P (Priestly) component is also present at the end of the book, in the passages dealing with the sanctuary, priests, and rituals, and in several points of the earlier story line, notably in the accounts of the marvels in Egypt and the deliverance at the sea. The final redaction reflects Priestly emphases of the sixth century BCE or later but also preserves ritual and ceremonial practices many centuries older.

#### STRUCTURE

The book can be subdivided into thematic and literary units in various ways; this one positions the revelation at Sinai and the covenant in the center:

**Part I: Israel in and out of Egypt (1.1–15.21):** God sees Israelite suffering in Egypt (chs 1–2), Moses becomes God’s spokesperson (3.1–7.7), and a series of calamities (7.7–13.16), known in tradition as the “ten plagues,” culminate in the escape of the people (13.17–15.21).

**Part II: Sinai and covenant (15.22–24.18):** After traveling through the wilderness (15.22–18.27), the Israelites reach Mount Sinai, where they experience a theophany (a divine appearance, chs 19, 24), and receive the covenant (chs 20–23).

**Part III: Sanctuary and new covenant (25.1–40.34):** An episode of apostasy followed by covenant renewal (chs 32–34) separates instructions for building the sanctuary (chs 25–31) from the account of its construction (chs 35–40).

## INTERPRETATION

Exodus is arguably the most important book in the Hebrew Bible. It contains an explanation of God's name YHWH and also fundamental biblical ideas about God, especially that God responds to and saves people who are suffering or oppressed. Major institutions of ancient Israel—such as prophecy, covenant, community regulations, a central shrine, festivals, sacrifice, and the sabbath—are grounded in the narrative of liberation. The Exodus story likely struck a resonant chord for Judeans experiencing defeat and exile in the sixth century BCE and later; for them, maintaining or restoring the institutions set forth in Exodus contributed to their emerging identity and to their very survival as a dispersed people. A similar dynamic is true for subsequent Jewish history. Although the institutions of Exodus played a lesser role in Christian tradition, the concept of divine self-revelation as manifest in Jesus Christ is rooted in the prominence of God's self-revelation in Exodus; and the story of suffering leading to redemption shapes key Christian beliefs. For both Jews and Christians, identification with the suffering in Egypt contributes to the moral imperative to alleviate the suffering of others. As a story of liberation, Exodus has infused hope into many peoples. Despite its many positive features, however, some aspects of Exodus—such as the loss of innocent Egyptian lives and the investment of community resources in an elaborate shrine—continue to trouble readers.

Carol Meyers

**1** These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each with his household: <sup>2</sup>Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, <sup>3</sup>Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin, <sup>4</sup>Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. <sup>5</sup>The total number of people born to Jacob was seventy. Joseph was already in Egypt. <sup>6</sup>Then Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. <sup>7</sup>But the Israelites were fruitful and prolific; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them.

<sup>8</sup>Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. <sup>9</sup>He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. <sup>10</sup>Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." <sup>11</sup>Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. They built supply cities, Pithom and Rameses, for Pharaoh. <sup>12</sup>But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and

**1.1–15.21: Israel in and out of Egypt.** The Israelites are oppressed in Egypt; but they escape through the intervention of their God, whose identity is revealed to their heroic leader Moses, who then carries out God's directives to secure their release.

**1.1–22: The oppression of the Israelites.** The introductory chapter, preceding the birth of Moses, connects Exodus with Genesis and serves as a prologue to the story of deliverance by describing how the Israelites became oppressed (in fulfillment of Gen 15.13). **1–7:** A shortened recapitulation of the account in Gen 46.8–27 of Jacob's family relocating in Egypt. **1:** *Israel* here refers to the patriarch Jacob (see Gen 32.28). **2–4:** Jacob's sons, the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel, are listed by groups according to their mothers (see Gen 29.31–30.24; 35.16–20, 23–26): Leah's six sons; Rachel's second son; two sons each of the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah; and Rachel's firstborn *Joseph*, the one with a position of power in the Egyptian court (Gen 41.37–45). **5:** Because the number seven and its multiples symbolize totality, the notion of *seventy* descendants of Jacob signifies that all Israel is present in Egypt (cf. Gen 46.27; Deut 10.22). **7:** The language of Israelite increase echoes God's commands at creation (Gen 1.28) and after the flood (Gen 9.1,7) and also God's promises to the ancestors (Gen 12.2; 15.5; 17.2; 18.18; 22.17; 26.4; 28.14; 46.3; 48.4), suggesting that originally broader divine promises are now fulfilled through Israel. **8–14:** The Egyptian ruler considers Israelite population growth a threat and attempts to restrict it, first by subjecting the Israelites to *forced labor*. **8:** The *new king* is often identified as Rameses II (1279–1213 BCE), but he is not named here or anywhere in the Bible. This anonymity, which perhaps demeans him, gives the narrative a general character. **10:** The possibility of *escape* is mentioned, foreshadowing what will eventually happen. **11:** *Forced labor* refers to *corvée* or compulsory unpaid labor, a typical way to mobilize labor for state projects in the ancient Near East (e.g., 1 Kings 5.13). *Supply cities* in border areas served military purposes. *Pithom* and *Rameses*



spread, so that the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.<sup>13</sup> The Egyptians became ruthless in imposing tasks on the Israelites,<sup>14</sup> and made their lives bitter with hard service in mortar and brick and in every kind of field labor. They were ruthless in all the tasks that they imposed on them.

<sup>15</sup>The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah,<sup>16</sup> “When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women, and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live.”<sup>17</sup> But the midwives feared God; they did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but they let the boys live.<sup>18</sup> So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, “Why have you done this, and allowed the boys to live?”<sup>19</sup> The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous and give birth before the midwife comes to them.”<sup>20</sup> So God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and became very strong.<sup>21</sup> And because the midwives feared God, he gave

them families.<sup>22</sup> Then Pharaoh commanded all his people, “Every boy that is born to the Hebrews<sup>a</sup> you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live.”

**2** Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman.<sup>2</sup> The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him three months.<sup>3</sup> When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river.<sup>4</sup> His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

<sup>5</sup>The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it.<sup>6</sup> When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said.<sup>7</sup> Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women

<sup>a</sup> Sam Gk Tg: Heb lacks *to the Hebrews*

were probably located in the eastern Nile Delta, protecting the northeastern frontier of Egypt; attempts to identify them with sites dating to the reign of Rameses II are inconclusive. **13–14:** Words using the Heb root meaning “to serve” appear five times in these two verses (translated *imposing tasks, service, labor, tasks, and imposed*), emphasizing the difficult lives of the Israelites; they are forced to work in state agriculture as well as construction. **15–22:** Forced labor fails to deplete the Israelite population, so another strategy, selective infanticide, is implemented. **15:** *Hebrew* seems to denote Israelites as a people, often in the speech of non-Israelites (e.g., Gen 14.13; Ex 21.2; 1 Sam 29.3), where it may be a derogatory term. *Shiphrah* and *Puah* are the first two of twelve women featured in the life of Moses, the deliverer of the twelve tribes. Some interpreters and ancient traditions consider them Egyptians who are “midwives to the Hebrews” rather than *Hebrew midwives*, but their Semitic names make it more likely that they are Hebrews. **16:** *Birthstool*, probably the two bricks or stones on which parturient women squatted; that position facilitated delivery. The instruction to *kill* infant boys, not girls, in order to limit population growth suggests the king’s ineptitude and introduces the violence that will recur in the ensuing story of oppression and liberation. **17:** *Feared God* indicates an awareness that killing would cause divine retribution. Heb *Elohim* is used for the deity here and often in the non-Priestly parts of Exodus, suggesting that much of the narrative derives from the E (Elohism) source. **22:** *Every boy . . . you shall throw into the Nile*, the final strategy for depleting the Israelite population, anticipates the appearance of the baby Moses.

**2.1–25: The emergence of Moses. 1–10:** As in the birth legends of other heroic figures in ancient literature, the miraculous rescue of the doomed infant Moses signifies that he is destined for greatness. **1:** Moses’s parents, both from the priestly tribe of *Levi*, are named in 6.20. *Woman*, Moses’s mother, the third in a series of twelve women featured in chs 1–2; see 1.15n. **2:** *Saw that he was a fine baby*, lit., “saw that he was good,” echoes the language of creation in Gen 1. **3:** The Heb word for *basket* appears elsewhere in the Bible only as a designation for Noah’s ark (Gen 6.14), on which Noah and his family and the animals are saved. Here it is the means for rescuing the person who will save the Israelites. *Reeds*, see 13.18n. **4:** Moses’s *sister*, named Miriam in 15.20 (perhaps in a different source), is the fourth woman of the story (see 1.15n.). She appears in more books of the Hebrew Bible (Numbers, Deuteronomy, 1 Chronicles, and Micah) than any other woman. **5:** The *royal daughter* is the fifth woman of chs 1–2; see 1.15n. **6:** *Hebrew*, see 1.15n. **7:** Hiring a wet *nurse* was usually a practice of elites in the ancient Near East.



to nurse the child for you?”<sup>8</sup> Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother.<sup>9</sup> Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took the child and nursed it.<sup>10</sup> When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses,<sup>a</sup> “because,” she said, “I drew him out<sup>b</sup> of the water.”

<sup>11</sup> One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsfolk.<sup>12</sup> He looked this way and that, and seeing no one he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.<sup>13</sup> When he went out the next day, he saw two Hebrews fighting; and he said to the one who was in the wrong, “Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew?”<sup>14</sup> He answered, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moses was afraid and thought, “Surely the thing is known.”<sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh heard of it, he sought to kill Moses.

But Moses fled from Pharaoh. He settled in the land of Midian, and sat down by a well.<sup>16</sup> The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father’s flock.<sup>17</sup> But

some shepherds came and drove them away. Moses got up and came to their defense and watered their flock.<sup>18</sup> When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?”<sup>19</sup> They said, “An Egyptian helped us against the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.”<sup>20</sup> He said to his daughters, “Where is he? Why did you leave the man? Invite him to break bread.”<sup>21</sup> Moses agreed to stay with the man, and he gave Moses his daughter Zipporah in marriage.<sup>22</sup> She bore a son, and he named him Gershom; for he said, “I have been an alien<sup>c</sup> residing in a foreign land.”

<sup>23</sup> After a long time the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned under their slavery, and cried out. Out of the slavery their cry for help rose up to God.<sup>24</sup> God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>25</sup> God looked upon the Israelites, and God took notice of them.

**3** Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and

<sup>a</sup> Heb *Mosheh*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *mashah*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *ger*

10: *Moses*, an Egyptian name meaning “is born” and often joined with a god’s name in Egyptian personal names (e.g., Thutmoses, Ahmoses, Rameses), is given a Heb etymology (“he who draws out”) in anticipation of Moses’s role in drawing his people through the sea (14.21–29; cf. Isa 63.11). 11–15: In the first two episodes of his adult life, Moses saves one Hebrew and tries to adjudicate between two others; both roles will recur and involve all his people. 11: *His kinsfolk*, he identifies with his people even though he was raised in the Egyptian court. 14–15a: Moses is rejected by his own people, and Pharaoh seeks his life. 14: *Ruler*, Heb “sar”; cf. 18.21,25. *Judge*, anticipates one of Moses’s many roles; see 18.13–27n. 15b–22: Moses flees to Midian and marries. 15b: *Midian*, in northwest Arabia. The Midianites, said to be descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25.2), were caravaneers whose routes stretched across Sinai toward Egypt. A *well*, where Moses meets his future wife, a pattern appearing in the stories of Rebekah (Gen 24) and Rachel (Gen 29). 16: Moses’s future father-in-law is a *priest*, who plays an important role in ch 18. *Seven daughters*, making a total of twelve female figures (see 1.15n.). 17: Saved by the daughter of a king, Moses now saves the daughters of a priest, one of whom will save him (4.24–26); the motif of saving recurs, anticipating the ultimate salvation or deliverance at the sea (13.17–15.21). 18: *Reuel*, elsewhere called Jethro (as 3.1) or Hobab (Judg 4.11), likely reflecting different ancient sources. 19: Probably because of his clothing, Moses is mistaken for an *Egyptian*. 21: *Gave . . . in marriage*, lit., “gave . . . as a wife,” a Heb idiom for marriage. 23–25: A postscript to the marriage episode provides a transition to the account of Moses becoming deliverer of his people in response to God’s call. *God* is mentioned in the midwives episode but only now is said to be aware of the Israelites’ plight. 23: They *cried*, the Egyptians eventually will cry louder (11.6), and the Israelites will cry again at the sea (14.10). Their *slavery*, that is, “their work.” 24: Referring to the ancestral *covenant* (Heb “berit,” as in 6.4–5; cf. 25.16n.) links Exodus with Genesis and anticipates the Sinai covenant (Ex 19–24).

3.1–4.17: *Moses’s call and mission*. The god of the ancestors appears to Moses in Midian, reveals the divine name, and commissions him to free his people. The term “prophet” is not used for Moses in Exodus, but this

came to Horeb, the mountain of God.<sup>2</sup> There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed.<sup>3</sup> Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.”<sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.”<sup>5</sup> Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.”<sup>6</sup> He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

<sup>7</sup> Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,<sup>8</sup> and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to

the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.<sup>9</sup> The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them.<sup>10</sup> So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”<sup>11</sup> But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”<sup>12</sup> He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to God, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”<sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.”<sup>a</sup> He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”<sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, “Thus you shall say to the

<sup>a</sup> Or *I AM WHAT I AM* or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*

call narrative, similar to Isa 6, Jer 1.4–10, and Ezek 1–3, presents him as one. 3.1–10: Theophany: a divine revelation at the bush, where several sources have been combined. 1: *Keeping the flock*, a shepherd is a metaphor for both human (e.g., 1 Sam 17.15; 2 Sam 5.2; 7.8) and divine (e.g., Pss 23.1; 80.1; 100.3) kings. *Horeb*, used only three times in Exodus, only in the E source, but ordinarily in Deuteronomy, is called *mountain of God*, perhaps indicating its sanctity for Midianites. More often the holy mountain is called “Sinai” in Exodus; see 19.1. 2: An *angel* (lit., “messenger”) is a manifestation of God, who sometimes takes human form. God’s physical presence also appears shielded in clouds and *fire* (e.g., Ex 19.9; 24.15–18; 33.9; 40.34–38), both sometimes depicted as *pillars* (Ex 13.21; 14.19,24); seeing God directly can be dangerous (see 3.6n). *Bush*, Heb *seneh*, an unidentifiable shrub perhaps alluding alliteratively to Sinai (cf. Deut 33.16), another site of divine presence and revelation. God’s appearance in a bush may also reflect the symbolism of plants or trees as markers of fertility and divine presence (see 25.31–40n.). 5: *Place* (Heb “maqom”) often signifies holy space (Gen 28.11; Josh 5.15), as does *holy ground*; both indicate a site of theophany. 6: Divine presence represents such intense, mysterious, and powerful holiness that it was considered dangerous to humans, hence Moses’s reluctance to *look* at God’s (physical) manifestation (see 19.10–15n.; cf. 24.10; 33.20,23; 34.29–35; contrast 33.11). 8: *Come down* implies that God resides in a heavenly abode (see 25.9n.). *Flowing with milk and honey* (also 33.3), a recurrent vision of a fertile land, is a reality only when people obey God (Deut 28). *Honey* is not bees’ honey but rather syrup made from cooking dates or grapes. *Canaanites* . . . *Jebusites* is one of several lists in the Pentateuch of the indigenous inhabitants of the land; the longest appears in Gen 15.19–21; cf. 13.5; 23.23,28; 33.2; 34.11. 10: Prophets are called and then sent to deliver God’s message (Isa 6.8; Jer 1.7). 3.11–4.17. Prophets are often reluctant, and Moses confronts God with four problematic issues. 3.11–12: Moses’s first problem is a sense of unworthiness for the mission; and the *sign* of divine help will be worship at the mountain. 13–15: The next problem is not knowing God’s name. Deities were identified by their proper names (not by generic “God”), and the Israelites will want to know which god has sent Moses to them. 14: *I am who I am* (Heb “‘ehyeh ‘asher ‘ehyeh”) renders the first name that God provides; a shortened form, *I am* (“‘ehyeh”), renders the second. These translations are uncertain, however, for the Hebrew is ambiguous. 15: The third name is *LORD*, which has four Heb letters, “yhwah” (probably pronounced Yahweh) in Hebrew and is thus known as the Tetragrammaton. Like the first two versions of God’s name, its root means “to be” but its specific meaning is unclear. Because of the great sanctity of God’s name, early Jewish tra-

Israelites, “The LORD,<sup>a</sup> the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’:

This is my name forever,  
and this my title for all generations.

<sup>16</sup> Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying: I have given heed to you and to what has been done to you in Egypt. <sup>17</sup> I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ <sup>18</sup> They will listen to your voice; and you and the elders of Israel shall go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us; let us now go a three days’ journey into the wilderness, so that we may sacrifice to the LORD our God.’ <sup>19</sup> I know, however, that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand.<sup>b</sup> <sup>20</sup> So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all my wonders that I will perform in it; after that he will let you go. <sup>21</sup> I will bring this people into such favor with the Egyptians that, when you go, you will not go empty-handed; <sup>22</sup> each woman shall ask her neighbor and any woman living in the neighbor’s house for jewelry of silver and of gold, and clothing, and you shall put them on your sons and on your daughters; and so you shall plunder the Egyptians.”

**4** Then Moses answered, “But suppose they do not believe me or listen to me, but say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you.’” <sup>2</sup> The LORD said to him, “What is that in your hand?” He said, “A staff.” <sup>3</sup> And he said, “Throw it on the ground.” So he threw the staff on the ground, and it became a snake; and Moses drew back from it. <sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Reach out your hand, and seize it by the tail”—so he reached out his hand and grasped it, and it became a staff in his hand—<sup>5</sup> “so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you.”

<sup>6</sup> Again, the LORD said to him, “Put your hand inside your cloak.” He put his hand into his cloak; and when he took it out, his hand was leprous,<sup>c</sup> as white as snow. <sup>7</sup> Then God said, “Put your hand back into your cloak”—so he put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored like the rest of his body—<sup>8</sup> “If they will not believe you or heed the first sign, they may believe the second sign. <sup>9</sup> If they will not believe even these two signs or heed you, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground; and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.”

<sup>a</sup> The word “LORD” when spelled with capital letters stands for the divine name, *YHWH*, which is here connected with the verb *hayah*, “to be”

<sup>b</sup> Gk Vg: Heb *no, not by a mighty hand*

<sup>c</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

dition avoided pronouncing it and used the Heb word *‘adonay* (“my lord”) as a substitute. Most translations respect that tradition and use LORD for the deity’s proper name. According to Gen 4.26 (see also Gen 13.4), people knew God’s name early in human history; but this passage along with 6.3 preserves a different tradition, that Moses is the first to hear it. In ancient nonbiblical sources this divine name is known from a Late Bronze Age inscription that mentions the “Shasu of *ya-h-wa* [or *yhw*]”; the Shasu were desert-dwellers and included Midianites. **16–22**: A directive to Moses about speaking to his people and Pharaoh precedes other two problems. **16**: *Elders*, usually used with “of Israel,” are representatives of the people in community governance (see also 4.29; 12.21; 17.5,6; 18.12; 19.7; 24.1,9,14). **18**: *God of the Hebrews*, which connects the LORD to a specific people, is used when Moses addresses non-Israelites (5.3; 7.16; 9.1; 9.13; 10.3); see 1.15n. Egyptians did give their state workers time off for religious events, so the request to make a *three days’ journey* is reasonable. **19**: *Mighty hand* is an image of divine power in the ancient Near East (13.9; 15.6). **22**: That an Israelite woman requests jewelry (see also 11.2–3; 12.35–36; 32.2–3) and clothing from her Egyptian *neighbor* suggests that they live peacefully together in workers’ villages; yet this transfer of goods is called *plunder*, perhaps in reference to Gen 15.14. **4.1–9**: God responds to Moses’s third problem, that the people will not heed him, by providing three supernatural signs: changing a *staff* (see 4.20n.) to a *snake* (4.2–5), making Moses’s *hand* diseased and then restoring it (4.6–8), and

<sup>10</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, “O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue.” <sup>11</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?” <sup>12</sup> Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak.” <sup>13</sup> But he said, “O my Lord, please send someone else.” <sup>14</sup> Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses and he said, “What of your brother Aaron the Levite? I know that he can speak fluently; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. <sup>15</sup> You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth; and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and will teach you what you shall do. <sup>16</sup> He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. <sup>17</sup> Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs.”

<sup>18</sup> Moses went back to his father-in-law Jethro and said to him, “Please let me go back to my kindred in Egypt and see whether they are still living.” And Jethro said to Moses, “Go

in peace.” <sup>19</sup> The LORD said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt; for all those who were seeking your life are dead.” <sup>20</sup> So Moses took his wife and his sons, put them on a donkey, and went back to the land of Egypt; and Moses carried the staff of God in his hand.

<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders that I have put in your power; but I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. <sup>22</sup> Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD: Israel is my firstborn son. <sup>23</sup> I said to you, ‘Let my son go that he may worship me.’ But you refused to let him go; now I will kill your firstborn son.’”

<sup>24</sup> On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. <sup>25</sup> But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son’s foreskin, and touched Moses’s feet with it, and said, “Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!” <sup>26</sup> So he let him alone. It was then she said, “A bridegroom of blood by circumcision.”

<sup>27</sup> The LORD said to Aaron, “Go into the wilderness to meet Moses.” So he went; and he

<sup>a</sup> Heb *his*

turning *water* bloody (4.9). The last sign anticipates the first of the marvels (7.14–25). **10–17:** God answers Moses’s fourth problem—that he cannot speak—by assuring him of divine help and assigning his brother to speak for him. **10:** *Slow of speech* may denote a speech impediment (cf. 6.12,30) or perhaps a prophet’s reluctance to accept a commission from God (cf. Jer 1.6–7). **14:** The first mention of *Aaron*, who would later found the priestly class. **15–16:** Aaron becomes spokesperson to Moses, who will be God to him. This makes Moses equal to the divine Pharaoh in the ensuing negotiations; see 7.1. **17:** *Staff*, see 4.20n.

**4.18–31: Moses returns to Egypt.** **20:** *Two sons*, as in 18.3, although only one is mentioned in 2.22 and 4.25. **20:** Moses’s shepherd staff (3.1; 4.2) is now called *the staff of God*, the instrument through which he and Aaron exert divine power; see further 17.9n. **21:** The motif of Pharaoh’s hardened *heart* (stubbornness), appearing frequently in the narrative of Moses’s negotiations with the Egyptian ruler, serves to increase dramatic tension. The number ten, though never mentioned explicitly, plays a role: Pharaoh hardens his own heart (e.g., 8.15) ten times, although even then it is part of God’s plan (7.3; 11.9); and ten times God hardens it directly (e.g., 9.12). These differing reports of who caused the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart likely reflect different sources. **22:** Based on the formulaic words of heralds bearing messages in the ancient Near East, the biblical expression *thus says the LORD* introduces words conveyed by a prophetic messenger of God. The prominent *firstborn son* motif is used here for Israel as the child of God (who will live), contrasting with chs 11 and 12, where it designates Egyptian offspring (who will die). See also Hos 11.1. **24–26:** In this enigmatic episode, God attacks Moses for reasons that are unclear. **24:** Moses again is saved by a woman, his wife Zipporah; see 2.17n. In performing her son’s circumcision, she may be carrying out a female role in Midianite and Israelite culture (1 Macc 1.60; 2 Macc 6.10; 4 Macc 4.25; cf. Gen 17.23–27 and Josh 5.2–7, where men are the circumcisers). **25:** *Feet*, a euphemism for genitals (see Isa 7.20). *Bridegroom of blood* may connote an ancient apotropaic (evil-averting) function of circumcision as a rite of passage, for the Heb word for bridegroom (“*ḥatan*”) in other Semitic languages can mean “protect” as well as “circumcise.” Marriage and circumcision are also associated in Gen 34.14–24. **27–31:** Aaron joins Moses and convinces the people with words and signs that God sees their plight. **27:** *Mountain of God*, see 3.1.

met him at the mountain of God and kissed him.<sup>28</sup> Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him, and all the signs with which he had charged him.<sup>29</sup> Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites.<sup>30</sup> Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses, and performed the signs in the sight of the people.<sup>31</sup> The people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

**5** Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Let my people go, so that they may celebrate a festival to me in the wilderness.’”<sup>2</sup> But Pharaoh said, “Who is the LORD, that I should heed him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and I will not let Israel go.”<sup>3</sup> Then they said, “The God of the Hebrews has revealed himself to us; let us go a three days’ journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the LORD our God, or he will fall upon us with pestilence or sword.”<sup>4</sup> But the king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their work? Get to your labors!”<sup>5</sup> Pharaoh continued, “Now they are more numerous than the people of the land<sup>a</sup> and yet you want them to stop working!”<sup>6</sup> That same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people, as well as their supervisors,<sup>7</sup> “You shall no longer give the people straw to make bricks, as before; let them go and gather straw for themselves.<sup>8</sup> But you shall require of them the same quantity of bricks as they have made previously; do not diminish it, for

they are lazy; that is why they cry, ‘Let us go and offer sacrifice to our God.’”<sup>9</sup> Let heavier work be laid on them; then they will labor at it and pay no attention to deceptive words.”

<sup>10</sup> So the taskmasters and the supervisors of the people went out and said to the people, “Thus says Pharaoh, ‘I will not give you straw.’”<sup>11</sup> Go and get straw yourselves, wherever you can find it; but your work will not be lessened in the least.”<sup>12</sup> So the people scattered throughout the land of Egypt, to gather stubble for straw.<sup>13</sup> The taskmasters were urgent, saying, “Complete your work, the same daily assignment as when you were given straw.”<sup>14</sup> And the supervisors of the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, and were asked, “Why did you not finish the required quantity of bricks yesterday and today, as you did before?”

<sup>15</sup> Then the Israelite supervisors came to Pharaoh and cried, “Why do you treat your servants like this?”<sup>16</sup> No straw is given to your servants, yet they say to us, ‘Make bricks!’ Look how your servants are beaten! You are unjust to your own people.”<sup>b</sup><sup>17</sup> He said, “You are lazy, lazy; that is why you say, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’”<sup>18</sup> Go now, and work; for no straw shall be given you, but you shall still deliver the same number of bricks.”<sup>19</sup> The Israelite supervisors saw that they were in trouble when they were told, “You shall not lessen your daily number of bricks.”<sup>20</sup> As they left Pharaoh, they came upon Moses

<sup>a</sup> Sam: Heb *The people of the land are now many*

<sup>b</sup> Gk Compare Syr Vg: Heb *beaten, and the sin of your people*

**5.1–6.1: Moses and Aaron have their first encounter with Pharaoh.** 5.1–3: They request only a three-day leave, not permanent freedom, but Pharaoh refuses as anticipated in 3.19. 1: *God of Israel*, cf. 3.18n. The imperative *Let my people go* appears for the first time and adumbrates its sevenfold use in the account of nine divine marvels; see 7.16n. 2: *Know the LORD*, which entails acknowledging the LORD’s authority, is a recurrent theme in Exodus; God’s mighty deeds will convince the Egyptians of God’s reality and power (14.4,18) and cause the Israelites to affirm their belief (16.12; 29.46). Knowing God is a response to witnessing God’s powerful deeds (1 Kings 20.13). 3: *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. *Fall . . . sword* indicates that failure to carry out religious obligations would have dire consequences. 4–19: Pharaoh again employs strategies, now also punitive, to deal with the burgeoning Israelite population. 6: *Supervisors*, Israelite officers (perhaps a subgroup of the elders; see 3.16n.) working under the Egyptian *taskmasters* in charge of corvée labor (see 1.11n.). 7: *Straw*, an essential component in brick-making, binds the particles of Nile mud. 9: *Deceptive words* refers to Moses’s promise of liberation. 10: Introducing Pharaoh’s words with *Thus says Pharaoh* sets him in opposition to the LORD, whose words are similarly announced (see 4.22n). 5.20–6.1: The Israelite supervisors are disheartened, and Moses complains to God who promises to take action.



and Aaron who were waiting to meet them.

<sup>21</sup>They said to them, “The LORD look upon you and judge! You have brought us into bad odor with Pharaoh and his officials, and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

<sup>22</sup>Then Moses turned again to the LORD and said, “O LORD, why have you mistreated this people? Why did you ever send me?”

<sup>23</sup>Since I first came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has mistreated this people, and you have done nothing at all to deliver your people.”

**6** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.”

<sup>2</sup>God also spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup>I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty,<sup>a</sup> but by my name ‘The LORD’<sup>b</sup> I did not make myself known to them. <sup>4</sup>I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. <sup>5</sup>I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup>Say therefore to the Israelites, ‘I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup>I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup>I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the

LORD.’” <sup>9</sup>Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, <sup>11</sup>“Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land.” <sup>12</sup>But Moses spoke to the LORD, “The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?”<sup>c</sup> <sup>13</sup>Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>The following are the heads of their ancestral houses: the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi; these are the families of Reuben. <sup>15</sup>The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,<sup>d</sup> the son of a Canaanite woman; these are the families of Simeon.

<sup>16</sup>The following are the names of the sons of Levi according to their genealogies: Gershon,<sup>e</sup> Kohath, and Merari, and the length of Levi’s life was one hundred thirty-seven years.

<sup>17</sup>The sons of Gershon:<sup>e</sup> Libni and Shimei, by their families. <sup>18</sup>The sons of Kohath: Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, and the length of Kohath’s life was one hundred thirty-three years. <sup>19</sup>The sons of Merari: Mahli and Mushi. These are the families of the Levites according to their genealogies. <sup>20</sup>Amram married

<sup>a</sup> Traditional rendering of Heb *El Shaddai*

<sup>b</sup> Heb *YHWH*; see note at 3.15

<sup>c</sup> Heb *me? I am uncircumcised of lips*

<sup>d</sup> Or *Saul*

<sup>e</sup> Also spelled *Gershom*; see 2.22

**6.2–7.7: God reaffirms the mission of Moses and Aaron** in the light of the worsened circumstances of the people. This section from the Priestly source parallels 3.1–4.17. **6.2:** God’s self-identification (also vv. 5 and 6) emphasizes the connection of God’s identity to the promise. **3:** The meaning of Heb *shaddai* (see text note *a*; Gen 17.1n.; 35.11), translated *Almighty*, is unclear; it may be an epithet meaning “the one of the mountains.” **4:** The ancestral *covenant* promised the land (Gen 15.7–21; 17.1–8; see 2.24n.). **5:** Similar to 2.23–25. **6–8:** Seven dynamic verbs (*will free, deliver, redeem, take, will be, will bring, will give*), with God as the first-person subject, connote the totality of God’s commitment. Two other verbs in dependent clauses (*swore, freed*) bring the total up to nine divine actions, anticipating the nine signs and wonders of the next section. **7:** *I will take you as my people, and I will be your God* is formulaic language linking the two partners of a covenant (Jer 31.33). *Know*, see 5.2n. **9:** *Cruel slavery*, or “hard work,” referring to their predicament rather than their status. **12:** *Poor speaker* (also v. 30) is another expression of a prophet’s reluctance; see 4.10n. **14–25:** A genealogy, similar to other genealogies in the Pentateuch (Gen 46.8–27; Num 3.1–37; 26). **16–25:** Authority is conferred on Moses, Aaron, and Aaron’s sons and grandsons by situating their lineage in the priestly tribe of Levi. The unusual naming of several women (vv. 20, 23, 25) emphasizes the importance of the Levites. **20:** Moses’s mother *Jochebed*, whose name

Jochebed his father's sister and she bore him Aaron and Moses, and the length of Amram's life was one hundred thirty-seven years. <sup>21</sup>The sons of Izhar: Korah, Nepheg, and Zichri. <sup>22</sup>The sons of Uzziel: Mishael, Elzaphan, and Sithri. <sup>23</sup>Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. <sup>24</sup>The sons of Korah: Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph; these are the families of the Korahites. <sup>25</sup>Aaron's son Eleazar married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the ancestral houses of the Levites by their families.

<sup>26</sup>It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, "Bring the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company."

<sup>27</sup>It was they who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, the same Moses and Aaron.

<sup>28</sup>On the day when the LORD spoke to Moses in the land of Egypt, <sup>29</sup>he said to him, "I am the LORD; tell Pharaoh king of Egypt all that I am speaking to you." <sup>30</sup>But Moses said

in the LORD's presence, "Since I am a poor speaker,<sup>a</sup> why would Pharaoh listen to me?"

**7** The LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. <sup>2</sup>You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land. <sup>3</sup>But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and I will multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. <sup>4</sup>When Pharaoh does not listen to you, I will lay my hand upon Egypt and bring my people the Israelites, company by company, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment. <sup>5</sup>The Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out from among them." <sup>6</sup>Moses and Aaron did so; they did just as the LORD commanded them. <sup>7</sup>Moses was eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

<sup>8</sup>The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, <sup>9</sup>"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a

<sup>a</sup> Heb *am uncircumcised of lips*; see 6.12

means "Yo [Yahweh] is glory," is the first person in the Bible to have a name formed with the name of Israel's God. *Aaron and Moses*, but not Miriam. 23: *Nadab and Abihu*, priestly leaders with Aaron in the Sinai narrative (24.1); cf. Lev 10.1–7. 25: *Eleazar . . . Phinehas*, the successors of Aaron (see Num 20.25–28; 25.1–13) conclude the genealogy, revealing its priestly interest; see 28.1. 26–30: The narrative resumes with a brief recapitulation of 6.2–12. 26: *Company by company*, military language depicts the fleeing Israelites (also 7.4; 12.17; 12.37n.; 13.18). 7.1–7: Another account of the affirmation of Moses's mission. 1: See 4.15–16n. 3: *Harden*, see 4.21n. *Signs and wonders* anticipates the nine marvels of the next section (see 7.7–10.29n.); these mighty acts of God, together with the climactic slaying of Egyptian firstborn, are the source of knowing God. 5: *Know*, see 5.2n. 7: *Eighty . . . eighty-three* makes Moses younger than Aaron, different from the firstborn tradition of 2.2.

**7.8–10.29: The nine marvels.** The designation "ten plagues" does not appear in the Bible, and fewer than ten catastrophes appear in the two psalms that mention them (Pss 78.44–51 and 105.28–36). The noun "plague" appears only for the slaying of the firstborn (11.1), except for once at 9.14 (see n.; cf. 8.2n). The Bible has several designations for the nine marvels: "signs and wonders" (7.3; Pss 78.43; 105.27), "signs" (10.1,2), and "wonders" (11.9,10). These terms do not fit the meaning of the Heb term for "plague" (root "ngp"), an epidemic of deadly disease as a punitive measure (cf. 32.35; Num 25.8,9,18,19). The marvels narrative likely draws from several sources to form a three-triad pattern, totaling nine marvels: Pharaoh receives a warning, in the morning, for the first, fourth, and seventh marvels; Pharaoh receives a warning, time unspecified, for the second, fifth, and eighth ones; the third, sixth, and ninth happen unannounced. Each triad has the same sequence, an arrangement suggesting that nine is the appropriate number; the slaying of the firstborn constitutes a separate climactic event. The marvels unfold in a dramatic series of encounters between God's emissaries, Moses and Aaron, and the deified Pharaoh and his officials and magicians; they result in Pharaoh's acknowledging ("knowing") God. Although each of the nine marvels depicts a horrific natural phenomenon, the intensity and rapid-fire timing provide a vivid expression of God's extraordinary power, as does the tenth event, the slaying of the firstborn. These disastrous events originate in literary/mythic traditions deployed to gripping dramatic effect.

**7.8–13: Preface to the marvels.** The introduction to the marvels, like 4.1–5, features a staff turning into a snake in competition with Egyptian magicians. 9: *Aaron*, not Moses, has the leading role in this episode and in the first three marvels, which incorporate material from the Priestly source, which emphasizes Aaron.



wonder,' then you shall say to Aaron, "Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.'" <sup>10</sup> So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the LORD had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. <sup>11</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. <sup>12</sup> Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron's staff swallowed up theirs. <sup>13</sup> Still Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said.

<sup>14</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is hardened; he refuses to let the people go. <sup>15</sup> Go to Pharaoh in the morning, as he is going out to the water; stand by at the river bank to meet him, and take in your hand the staff that was turned into a snake. <sup>16</sup> Say to him, "The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, sent me to you to say, "Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the wilderness." But until now you have not listened. <sup>17</sup> Thus says the LORD, "By this you shall know that I am the LORD." See, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall be turned to blood. <sup>18</sup> The fish in the river shall die, the river itself shall stink, and the Egyptians shall be unable to drink water from the Nile.'" <sup>19</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Say to Aaron, "Take your staff and stretch out your hand over the waters

of Egypt—over its rivers, its canals, and its ponds, and all its pools of water—so that they may become blood; and there shall be blood throughout the whole land of Egypt, even in vessels of wood and in vessels of stone.'"

<sup>20</sup> Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded. In the sight of Pharaoh and of his officials he lifted up the staff and struck the water in the river, and all the water in the river was turned into blood, <sup>21</sup> and the fish in the river died. The river stank so that the Egyptians could not drink its water, and there was blood throughout the whole land of Egypt. <sup>22</sup> But the magicians of Egypt did the same by their secret arts; so Pharaoh's heart remained hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. <sup>23</sup> Pharaoh turned and went into his house, and he did not take even this to heart. <sup>24</sup> And all the Egyptians had to dig along the Nile for water to drink, for they could not drink the water of the river.

<sup>25</sup> Seven days passed after the LORD had struck the Nile.

**8**<sup>a</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, "Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. <sup>2</sup> If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. <sup>3</sup> The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come

<sup>a</sup> Ch 7.26 in Heb

**11:** *Magicians* appear for the first time; the Heb term is derived from an Egyptian word denoting a priestly official. *Secret arts* refers to spells or incantations that the Egyptians use, whereas Aaron simply casts his staff down. **13:** *Hardened*, appearing in the preface, anticipates Pharaoh's response to every marvel and to the climactic plague; see 4.21n. *As . . . said*, noting the veracity of God's predictions here and for most of the marvels.

**7.14–8.19:** **First three marvels.** Aaron's staff is the instrument of divine power. **7.14–25:** **First marvel, bloody waters.** This marvel, like some others, combines two traditions: in one, Moses's action pollutes the Nile only; in the other, Aaron turns all Egyptian water into blood. **15:** *Water* and *river bank* evoke the image of the infant Moses in the river (2.3) and anticipate the role of water in the final water event, when the Red (Reed) Sea splits and Egyptian troops drown (14.21–29). **16–17:** The Israelites have heard what God will do (6.6–8), as has Moses (7.1–5); now Pharaoh is told. **16:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. *Let my people go* appears six more times in the marvels sequence (8.20,21; 9.1,13; 10.3,4; cf. 5.1); this sevenfold usage emphasizes the theme of freeing the Israelites. **17:** The entire *Nile* turns bloody, making this far more extensive than the bloody-water sign to the Israelites (4.9). *Blood* in the Nile may reflect the reddish color of extreme flooding, but bloody water also symbolizes dire misfortune in ancient Near Eastern literature. **18:** *Egyptians* (but apparently not Israelites) will be affected (as in vv. 21,24, and in the next marvel, 8.3–4,9–11). **19:** The abundance of water terms, *rivers . . . water*, stresses the role of water; see 7.15n. **22:** Magicians can duplicate this calamity; but again (as in 7.11) they must use spells, and humorously they make the calamity even worse! **22:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **8.1–15:** **Second marvel, frogs. 2:** *Plague*, better "smite." **3:** The three elements of Egypt's hierarchical society—Pharaoh, his *officials*, and the *peo-*

up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people,<sup>a</sup> and into your ovens and your kneading bowls.<sup>4</sup> The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.”<sup>5b</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’”<sup>6</sup> So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt.<sup>7</sup> But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, “Pray to the LORD to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup> Moses said to Pharaoh, “Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.”<sup>10</sup> And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the LORD our God,<sup>11</sup> the frogs shall leave you and your houses and your officials and your people; they shall be left only in the Nile.”<sup>12</sup> Then Moses and Aaron went out from Pharaoh; and Moses cried out to the LORD concerning the frogs that he had brought upon Pharaoh.<sup>c</sup> <sup>13</sup> And the LORD did as Moses requested: the frogs died in the houses, the courtyards, and the fields.<sup>14</sup> And they gathered them together in heaps, and the land stank.<sup>15</sup> But when Pharaoh saw that there was a respite, he

hardened his heart, and would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

<sup>16</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.’”<sup>17</sup> And they did so; Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and gnats came on humans and animals alike; all the dust of the earth turned into gnats throughout the whole land of Egypt.

<sup>18</sup> The magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, but they could not. There were gnats on both humans and animals.

<sup>19</sup> And the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God!” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, as he goes out to the water, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD: Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’<sup>21</sup> For if you will not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you, your officials, and your people, and into your houses; and the houses of the Egyptians shall be filled with swarms of flies; so also the land where they live.<sup>22</sup> But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people live, so that no swarms of flies shall be there, that you may know that I the LORD am in this land.<sup>23</sup> Thus I will make

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *upon your people*

<sup>b</sup> Ch 8.1 in Heb

<sup>c</sup> Or *frogs, as he had agreed with Pharaoh*

*ple*, that is, all Egyptians—are affected. They are mentioned nine times in the marvels sequence and once more in the account of the slaying of the firstborn (12.30). **8:** Despite the magicians’ replication of this event (v. 7), Pharaoh momentarily relents and seems to recognize Israel’s god by requesting that Moses and Aaron pray (lit., “plead”) on behalf of the Egyptians (cf. 8.28–30; 9.28; 10.17–18). **10:** *Tomorrow*, a one-day delay; see 8.23n. Pharaoh is depicted as a buffoon for not opting to cease the plague immediately. **15:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **8.16–19:** **Third marvel, gnats.** Unlike the two previous wonders, which combine Priestly and non-Priestly material, this wonder is entirely Priestly, and thus less internally repetitive and more consistent. **16:** *Dust* represents what is countless (Gen 13.16). **18–19:** Failing this time to replicate the calamity, the magicians—but not Pharaoh—recognize the infestation as an act of Israel’s god. **19:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n.

**8.20–9.12: Second group of three marvels.** Instrumentality shifts: God is the direct agent (8.24; 9.6), then Moses and Aaron together are agents (9.8). **8.20–32: Fourth marvel, flies.** **20:** Although Aaron is sometimes mentioned, *Moses* dominates the accounts of the remaining six marvels. **21:** The meaning of the Heb word for *flies* is uncertain, but it likely denotes biting insects (cf. Pss 78.45; 105.31). **22:** *Goshen*, unknown in Egyptian sources, appears here and in 9.26 as the location of the Israelite work camps, probably in the eastern Nile Delta; see 1.11n. and Gen 45.10. **23:** *Distinction*, now God explicitly excludes the Israelites from the calamities; see 7.18n.

a distinction<sup>a</sup> between my people and your people. This sign shall appear tomorrow.’”

<sup>24</sup>The LORD did so, and great swarms of flies came into the house of Pharaoh and into his officials’ houses; in all of Egypt the land was ruined because of the flies.

<sup>25</sup>Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God within the land.” <sup>26</sup>But Moses said, “It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God are offensive to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us? <sup>27</sup>We must go a three days’ journey into the wilderness and sacrifice to the LORD our God as he commands us.” <sup>28</sup>So Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to sacrifice to the LORD your God in the wilderness, provided you do not go very far away. Pray for me.” <sup>29</sup>Then Moses said, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD that the swarms of flies may depart tomorrow from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; only do not let Pharaoh again deal falsely by not letting the people go to sacrifice to the LORD.”

<sup>30</sup>So Moses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. <sup>31</sup>And the LORD did as Moses asked: he removed the swarms of flies from Pharaoh, from his officials, and from his people; not one remained. <sup>32</sup>But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and would not let the people go.

**9** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. <sup>2</sup>For if you refuse to let them go and still hold them, <sup>3</sup>the hand of the LORD will strike with a deadly pestilence your livestock in the field: the horses, the donkeys, the camels, the herds, and the flocks. <sup>4</sup>But the LORD will make a

distinction between the livestock of Israel and the livestock of Egypt, so that nothing shall die of all that belongs to the Israelites.’”

<sup>5</sup>The LORD set a time, saying, “Tomorrow the LORD will do this thing in the land.” <sup>6</sup>And on the next day the LORD did so; all the livestock of the Egyptians died, but of the livestock of the Israelites not one died. <sup>7</sup>Pharaoh inquired and found that not one of the livestock of the Israelites was dead. But the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the people go.

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, “Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw it in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. <sup>9</sup>It shall become fine dust all over the land of Egypt, and shall cause festering boils on humans and animals throughout the whole land of Egypt.” <sup>10</sup>So they took soot from the kiln, and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it caused festering boils on humans and animals. <sup>11</sup>The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils, for the boils afflicted the magicians as well as all the Egyptians. <sup>12</sup>But the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh, and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Rise up early in the morning and present yourself before Pharaoh, and say to him, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. <sup>14</sup>For this time I will send all my plagues upon you yourself, and upon your officials, and upon your people, so that you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth. <sup>15</sup>For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your people with pestilence,

<sup>a</sup> Gk Vg: Heb *will set redemption*

*Tomorrow* introduces a time element; a delay in the onset of the marvel (as also in 9.5,18; 10.4) is a twist on the delay of Moses’s wonder-ending prayer (8.10n.). **25:** Pharaoh seems to relent (as in 8.8) but reneges in v. 32. **26:** *Offensive*, practices of one people are odious to another; cf. Gen 46.34. **28–29:** *Pray*, as in 8.9. **32:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **9.1–7:** **Fifth marvel, pestilence.** 1: *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. 3: *Hand*, see 3.19n. *Pestilence* in Deuteronomic and prophetic texts kills both humans and animals, but here only animals. **4:** *Distinction*, see 8.23n. **5:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. **7:** *Hardened*, see 4.21n. **9.8–12:** **Sixth marvel, boils.** **11:** *Magicians* cannot compete and are themselves afflicted (cf. 7.11,22; 8.7,18–19). **12:** Now God hardens Pharaoh’s heart; see 4.21n.

**9.13–10.29:** **Third group of three marvels.** Moses’s outstretched hand is now the instrument, and the severity of the calamities escalates. **9.13–35:** **Seventh marvel, hail.** **13:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. **14:** Only here is *plagues* used for one of the nine marvels, perhaps because of the extensive loss of human and animal life, as for

and you would have been cut off from the earth.<sup>16</sup> But this is why I have let you live: to show you my power, and to make my name resound through all the earth.<sup>17</sup> You are still exalting yourself against my people, and will not let them go.<sup>18</sup> Tomorrow at this time I will cause the heaviest hail to fall that has ever fallen in Egypt from the day it was founded until now.<sup>19</sup> Send, therefore, and have your livestock and everything that you have in the open field brought to a secure place; every human or animal that is in the open field and is not brought under shelter will die when the hail comes down upon them.’”<sup>20</sup> Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried their slaves and livestock off to a secure place.<sup>21</sup> Those who did not regard the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the open field.

<sup>22</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that hail may fall on the whole land of Egypt, on humans and animals and all the plants of the field in the land of Egypt.”<sup>23</sup> Then Moses stretched out his staff toward heaven, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire came down on the earth. And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt;<sup>24</sup> there was hail with fire flashing continually in the midst of it, such heavy hail as had never fallen in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation.<sup>25</sup> The hail struck down everything that was in the open field throughout all the land of Egypt, both human and animal; the hail also struck down all the plants of the field, and shattered every tree in the field.<sup>26</sup> Only in the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were, there was no hail.

<sup>27</sup>Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron, and said to them, “This time I have sinned; the LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong.”<sup>28</sup> Pray to the LORD!

Enough of God’s thunder and hail! I will let you go; you need stay no longer.”<sup>29</sup> Moses said to him, “As soon as I have gone out of the city, I will stretch out my hands to the LORD; the thunder will cease, and there will be no more hail, so that you may know that the earth is the LORD’s.”<sup>30</sup> But as for you and your officials, I know that you do not yet fear the LORD God.”<sup>31</sup> (Now the flax and the barley were ruined, for the barley was in the ear and the flax was in bud.<sup>32</sup> But the wheat and the spelt were not ruined, for they are late in coming up.)<sup>33</sup> So Moses left Pharaoh, went out of the city, and stretched out his hands to the LORD; then the thunder and the hail ceased, and the rain no longer poured down on the earth.<sup>34</sup> But when Pharaoh saw that the rain and the hail and the thunder had ceased, he sinned once more and hardened his heart, he and his officials.<sup>35</sup> So the heart of Pharaoh was hardened, and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses.

**10** Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh; for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his officials, in order that I may show these signs of mine among them,<sup>2</sup> and that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I have made fools of the Egyptians and what signs I have done among them—so that you may know that I am the LORD.”

<sup>3</sup>So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and said to him, “Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me.’<sup>4</sup> For if you refuse to let my people go, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country.<sup>5</sup> They shall cover the surface of the land, so that no one will be able to see the land. They shall

the climactic slaying of the firstborn; see 7.8–10.29n. and 11.1n. **18:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. So severe is the hail that it figures in the next calamity (10.5,15). **19:** The severity prompts God, uniquely, to suggest a protective measure. **22:** *Hail*, frequently Yahweh’s weapon (e.g., Josh 10.11, Isa 30.20; Ezek 13.13). **24:** *Fire flashing*, lightning, along with thunder accompanies the hail (vv. 23–24) to deadly effect; compare the thunder and lightning of the Sinai theophany (see 19.16–19n.). **26:** See 8.22n. and 8.23n. **27:** *Sinned*, an apparently unqualified admission; but Pharaoh continues to sin by reneging again (v. 34; 8.15,32). **28:** *Pray*, see 8.8n. **35:** *Hardened*, apparently by God; see 4.21n. **10.1–20:** *Eighth marvel, locusts*. **1:** God *hardened* the hearts of both Pharaoh and his officers; see 4.21n. **2:** *Tell . . . grandchildren* heralds the importance of remembering; see 11.1–13.16n. **3:** *God of the Hebrews*, see 3.18n. **4:** *Tomorrow*, see 8.23n. *Locusts* are extremely damaging; a common literary theme in the ancient Near East, they reflect disaster (Joel 1.2–2.27) and divine judgment (Amos 4.9). **5:** *No one . . . see*, a result replicated

devour the last remnant left you after the hail, and they shall devour every tree of yours that grows in the field. <sup>6</sup> They shall fill your houses, and the houses of all your officials and of all the Egyptians—something that neither your parents nor your grandparents have seen, from the day they came on earth to this day.” Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh.

<sup>7</sup> Pharaoh’s officials said to him, “How long shall this fellow be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God; do you not yet understand that Egypt is ruined?” <sup>8</sup> So Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh, and he said to them, “Go, worship the LORD your God! But which ones are to go?” <sup>9</sup> Moses said, “We will go with our young and our old; we will go with our sons and daughters and with our flocks and herds, because we have the LORD’s festival to celebrate.” <sup>10</sup> He said to them, “The LORD indeed will be with you, if ever I let your little ones go with you! Plainly, you have some evil purpose in mind. <sup>11</sup> No, never! Your men may go and worship the LORD, for that is what you are asking.” And they were driven out from Pharaoh’s presence.

<sup>12</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt, so that the locusts may come upon it and eat every plant in the land, all that the hail has left.” <sup>13</sup> So Moses stretched out his staff over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day and all that night; when morning came, the east wind had brought the locusts. <sup>14</sup> The locusts came upon all the land of Egypt and settled on the whole country of Egypt, such a dense swarm of locusts as had never been before, nor ever shall be again. <sup>15</sup> They covered the surface of the whole land, so that the land was black; and they ate all the plants in the land and all the fruit of the trees that the hail had left; nothing green was left, no tree, no plant in

the field, in all the land of Egypt. <sup>16</sup> Pharaoh hurriedly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned against the LORD your God, and against you. <sup>17</sup> Do forgive my sin just this once, and pray to the LORD your God that at the least he remove this deadly thing from me.” <sup>18</sup> So he went out from Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. <sup>19</sup> The LORD changed the wind into a very strong west wind, which lifted the locusts and drove them into the Red Sea;<sup>a</sup> not a single locust was left in all the country of Egypt. <sup>20</sup> But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

<sup>21</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven so that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness that can be felt.” <sup>22</sup> So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was dense darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. <sup>23</sup> People could not see one another, and for three days they could not move from where they were; but all the Israelites had light where they lived. <sup>24</sup> Then Pharaoh summoned Moses, and said, “Go, worship the LORD. Only your flocks and your herds shall remain behind. Even your children may go with you.” <sup>25</sup> But Moses said, “You must also let us have sacrifices and burnt offerings to sacrifice to the LORD our God. <sup>26</sup> Our livestock also must go with us; not a hoof shall be left behind, for we must choose some of them for the worship of the LORD our God, and we will not know what to use to worship the LORD until we arrive there.” <sup>27</sup> But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he was unwilling to let them go. <sup>28</sup> Then Pharaoh said to him, “Get away from me! Take care that you do not see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die.” <sup>29</sup> Moses said, “Just as you say! I will never see your face again.”

<sup>a</sup> Or *Sea of Reeds*

by the ninth marvel (10.23). 13: An *east wind*, which will also part the Red (Reed) Sea (14.21), brings the locusts; and a “west wind” will later remove them by casting them into that sea (v. 19). 16: *Sinned*, see 9.27n. 17–18: *Pray*, see 8.8n. 19: *Red Sea*, see 13.18n. 20: *Hardened by God*; see 4.21n. 10:21–29: Ninth marvel, darkness, another common literary theme. 21: *Darkness* anticipates the midnight setting of the death of firstborns (12.29) and the nighttime sea crossing (14.20). 22: *Three days* mirrors the requested three-day journey for sacrifice (3.18; 5.3; 8.27) and anticipates the three-day duration of the first post-Sinai journey (15.22). 27: *Hardened by God*; see 4.21n.



**11** The LORD said to Moses, “I will bring one more plague upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here; indeed, when he lets you go, he will drive you away.”<sup>2</sup> Tell the people that every man is to ask his neighbor and every woman is to ask her neighbor for objects of silver and gold.”<sup>3</sup> The LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover, Moses himself was a man of great importance in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh’s officials and in the sight of the people.

<sup>4</sup> Moses said, “Thus says the LORD: About midnight I will go out through Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne to the firstborn of the female slave who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the livestock.<sup>6</sup> Then there will be a loud cry throughout the whole land of Egypt, such as has never been or will ever be again.<sup>7</sup> But not a dog shall growl at any of the Israelites—not at people, not at animals—so that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.<sup>8</sup> Then all these officials of yours shall come down to

me, and bow low to me, saying, ‘Leave us, you and all the people who follow you.’ After that I will leave.” And in hot anger he left Pharaoh.

<sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh will not listen to you, in order that my wonders may be multiplied in the land of Egypt.”

<sup>10</sup> Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh; but the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he did not let the people of Israel go out of his land.

**12** The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt:<sup>2</sup> This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.<sup>3</sup> Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household.<sup>4</sup> If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it.<sup>5</sup> Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats.<sup>6</sup> You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight.

**11.1–13.16: Plague, commemorative rituals, and departure.** After the firstborn plague is announced, detailed commands for commemorative rituals are interspersed with accounts of Egyptian deaths and the Israelite Exodus. Although addressed to Israelites as they leave Egypt, the directives for various rituals also mandate future acts commemorating the radical change from servitude to freedom through divine intervention. The miraculous departure from Egypt becomes part of the collective memory of future generations, kept alive through religious practices that enable later generations to recall and relive the formative Exodus experiences. The rituals will contribute to Israelite communal identity. Present and future merge in this composite and somewhat redundant account drawing on Priestly and other sources.

**11.1–10: Announcement of the plague.** 1: *Plague*, better “affliction”; see 7.8–10.29n. and 9.14n. *Drive* echoes the prediction of 6.1. 2: In 3.22 women acquire jewelry and clothing; here men and women will obtain jewelry but not clothing (see also 12.35–36; 35.22,29. 5: *Firstborn*, see 4.22n. *Pharaoh . . . female slave*, opposite ends of the socioeconomic spectrum form a merism indicating that all Egyptians will be affected. 6: The Egyptians’ unique *loud cry* surpasses the Israelites’ cry (see 2.2n.). Uniqueness also features in the seventh and eighth marvels (9.18,25; 10.14). 7: *Distinction between Egypt and Israel*, again indicating the selective nature of what will happen (see 8.23n. and 9.4). 10: *Hardened by God*, see 4.21n.

**12.1–28: Preparations for departure: passover and unleavened bread festivals.** Here and in vv. 43–49 and 13.3–10, God ordains what will become a major Israelite festival (Deut 16.1–8; Num 9.1–14; 2 Kings 23.21–23; Ezek 45.21–24). Pastoral and agricultural components of the originally Canaanite ritual calendar—springtime birth of sheep and goats, growth of green herbs, and ripening of grains—are now historicized. These festivals, which were originally separate, are linked to each other and to the Exodus, helping to re-create for later generations the exultant experience of liberation. 1–13: **Passover.** 2: *This month* (March–April), called Abib in 13.4 and 23.15, is later called Nisan (Neh 2.1; Esth 3.7). This spring New Year (*first month of the year*) reflects a Priestly reckoning (Lev 23.5; Num 9.1–5) in contrast to an older tradition of an autumn New Year (23.16; 34.22). 3: *Whole congregation of Israel*, repeated in v. 47, refers to the adult males of the community. 4: *Household* likely indicates an extended (not a nuclear) family—enough people to consume a roasted animal in one sitting. 5: *Without*

<sup>7</sup>They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. <sup>9</sup>Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. <sup>10</sup>You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. <sup>11</sup>This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. <sup>12</sup>For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup>The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance. <sup>15</sup>Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses, for whoever eats leavened bread from the first

day until the seventh day shall be cut off from Israel. <sup>16</sup>On the first day you shall hold a solemn assembly, and on the seventh day a solemn assembly; no work shall be done on those days; only what everyone must eat, that alone may be prepared by you. <sup>17</sup>You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for on this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt: you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance. <sup>18</sup>In the first month, from the evening of the fourteenth day until the evening of the twenty-first day, you shall eat unleavened bread. <sup>19</sup>For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether an alien or a native of the land. <sup>20</sup>You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your settlements you shall eat unleavened bread.

<sup>21</sup>Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go, select lambs for your families, and slaughter the passover lamb.

<sup>22</sup>Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood in the basin. None of you shall go outside the door of your house until morning. <sup>23</sup>For the LORD will pass through to strike down the Egyptians; when he sees the blood on the lintel and on

*blemish*, offerings to God must be perfect (Lev 22.19–25; Deut 15.21; 17.1). **7:** *Blood* can have an apotropaic quality; see 4.25n. and 12.11n. **8:** The animal slaughtered for the festal meal is to be *roasted over fire*, a preparation making it seem like an offering (cf. Lev 1.7–9), but without using a sacrificial term. *Unleavened bread* appears here without comment, as if it were already known and incorporated into the passover festival; see 12.15n. *Bitter herbs*, a green plant serving as a condiment. **11:** The people must be ready to travel while they consume the young sheep or goat (v. 5). *Passover* (“pesah”), often understood as “passing over,” is more likely from a word meaning “protect” (“spare,” Isa 31.5), which is in accord with the apotropaic role of the blood smeared on doorways (12.5n.). Here (and in vv. 27, 43) “passover” refers to the slaughter and eating of the animal; eventually, it designates a longer commemorative festival (Deut 16.1–8; Ezek 45.21) that includes the following seven-day festival of unleavened bread (12.14–20; 13.2–10). **12:** *I will strike* has God slaying the firstborn (but see 12.23n.) of both humans and animals. Israel’s god thus wins the contest with the *gods of Egypt* (cf. 15.11). **13:** *Pass over*, see 12.11n. **14–20: Unleavened bread.** **14:** This day is the fifteenth day, after the passover of the fourteenth of Nisan; see 12.2n. and 12.6. Thus, the nighttime passover is followed by a seven-day festival of unleavened bread (see Lev 23.5–8). *Remembrance* proclaims the festival’s commemorative aspect (see 13.9n), and *throughout . . . perpetual* applies it to all future Israelites (see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n.). **15:** *Unleavened bread* (Heb “matsah,” spelled “matzah” or “matzo” in English; also vv. 34, 39; 23.15; 34.18), part of an ancient spring barley harvest festival, is connected to the hasty departure from Egypt; see 12.11n. and 11.1–13.16n. *Cut off*, the penalty for many serious violations of Priestly law (e.g., 30.33, 38; 31.14), signifies dying without heirs, thus ending one’s lineage; it would be implemented by God, not humans. **16:** *No work* signifies a holy day, as on the sabbath (20.8–11). **17:** *Companies*, a military term; see 6.26n. **19:** Although not obliged to celebrate the passover (v. 48), an *alien* (non-Israelite) must refrain from eating leavened bread. **21–28: Passover again.** **22:** *Hyssop*, an aromatic plant used in dipping and sprinkling rituals (e.g., Lev 14.6–7; Num 19.18). **23:** *Pass over*, that is, “protect”; see 12.11n. Representing a



the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over that door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you down.

<sup>24</sup>You shall observe this rite as a perpetual ordinance for you and your children. <sup>25</sup>When you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this observance. <sup>26</sup>And when your children ask you, 'What do you mean by this observance?' <sup>27</sup>you shall say, 'It is the passover sacrifice to the LORD, for he passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt, when he struck down the Egyptians but spared our houses.'" And the people bowed down and worshiped.

<sup>28</sup>The Israelites went and did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.

<sup>29</sup>At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and all the firstborn of the livestock.

<sup>30</sup>Pharaoh arose in the night, he and all his officials and all the Egyptians; and there was a loud cry in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. <sup>31</sup>Then he summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, "Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD, as you said.

<sup>32</sup>Take your flocks and your herds, as you said, and be gone. And bring a blessing on me too!"

<sup>33</sup>The Egyptians urged the people to hasten their departure from the land, for

they said, "We shall all be dead."<sup>34</sup> So the people took their dough before it was leavened, with their kneading bowls wrapped up in their cloaks on their shoulders. <sup>35</sup>The Israelites had done as Moses told them; they had asked the Egyptians for jewelry of silver and gold, and for clothing, <sup>36</sup>and the LORD had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And so they plundered the Egyptians.

<sup>37</sup>The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides children. <sup>38</sup>A mixed crowd also went up with them, and livestock in great numbers, both flocks and herds. <sup>39</sup>They baked unleavened cakes of the dough that they had brought out of Egypt; it was not leavened, because they were driven out of Egypt and could not wait, nor had they prepared any provisions for themselves.

<sup>40</sup>The time that the Israelites had lived in Egypt was four hundred thirty years. <sup>41</sup>At the end of four hundred thirty years, on that very day, all the companies of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. <sup>42</sup>That was for the LORD a night of vigil, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That same night is a vigil to be kept for the LORD by all the Israelites throughout their generations.

<sup>43</sup>The LORD said to Moses and Aaron: This is the ordinance for the passover: no

variant tradition, a divine agent, *the destroyer*, rather than God, carries out the mission. 24–27: Commands for future observance emphasize the pedagogic function of the passover (also 10.2; 13.8–9,14–16; cf. Deut 6.6–7); see 11.1–13.16n.

12.29–52: **Plague, departure, and passover.** As soon as the Egyptian firstborns die, the Israelites leave Egypt and are reminded to celebrate the passover. 29–36: **Plague.** What God announced in 11.1–8 is carried out. 29: *Firstborn*, see 4.22n. 30: *Cry*, see 11.6n. 33: *Urged*, perhaps fulfilling the notion of driving out the Israelites (6.1; 11.1). 35: *Jewelry . . . clothing*, rather than "plunder" (in v. 36; see 3.22n.). 12.37–42: Departing Egypt and beginning the wilderness journey (which continues in the book of Numbers). 37: Each stage of the journey is marked by formulaic language: traveling from Place A to Place B. *Rameses* (see 1.11n.) and *Succoth* are probably in the eastern Nile Delta; however, like virtually every stop on the journey, they cannot be clearly identified and do not reflect accurate or actual memories. *Six hundred thousand men* (as Num 11.21; cf. 38.26) is hyperbole indicating the proliferation of Israelites (1.7–9,20; 5.5) and the idea that all Israel experienced the Exodus; cf. 14.7n. *Men on foot*, or infantry, continues the military imagery; see 6.26n. Children are mentioned, but not the elderly or women; the latter may be subsumed into their husbands, the "men" (see 20.8–11n). 38: *Mixed crowd* suggests that non-Israelites also escape. 39: See 12.15n. 40–41: *Four hundred and thirty years* is close to the period of "four hundred years" foreordained in Gen 15.13 (but cf. Gen 15.16); suggested reasons for the additional thirty years are speculative. 41: *Companies*, see 12.17n. 42: *Vigil*, from a root meaning "to guard" and also "to observe, perform (an obligation)" appears twice, forming a wordplay connoting present divine protection and future Israelite commemoration. 43–51: **Further passover instructions**, explicitly for future observances. 43: *Ordinance for*

foreigner shall eat of it,<sup>44</sup> but any slave who has been purchased may eat of it after he has been circumcised;<sup>45</sup> no bound or hired servant may eat of it.<sup>46</sup> It shall be eaten in one house; you shall not take any of the animal outside the house, and you shall not break any of its bones.<sup>47</sup> The whole congregation of Israel shall celebrate it.<sup>48</sup> If an alien who resides with you wants to celebrate the pass-over to the LORD, all his males shall be circumcised; then he may draw near to celebrate it; he shall be regarded as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it;<sup>49</sup> there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.

<sup>50</sup>All the Israelites did just as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron.<sup>51</sup> That very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of the land of Egypt, company by company.

**13** The LORD said to Moses:<sup>2</sup> Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the Israelites, of human beings and animals, is mine.

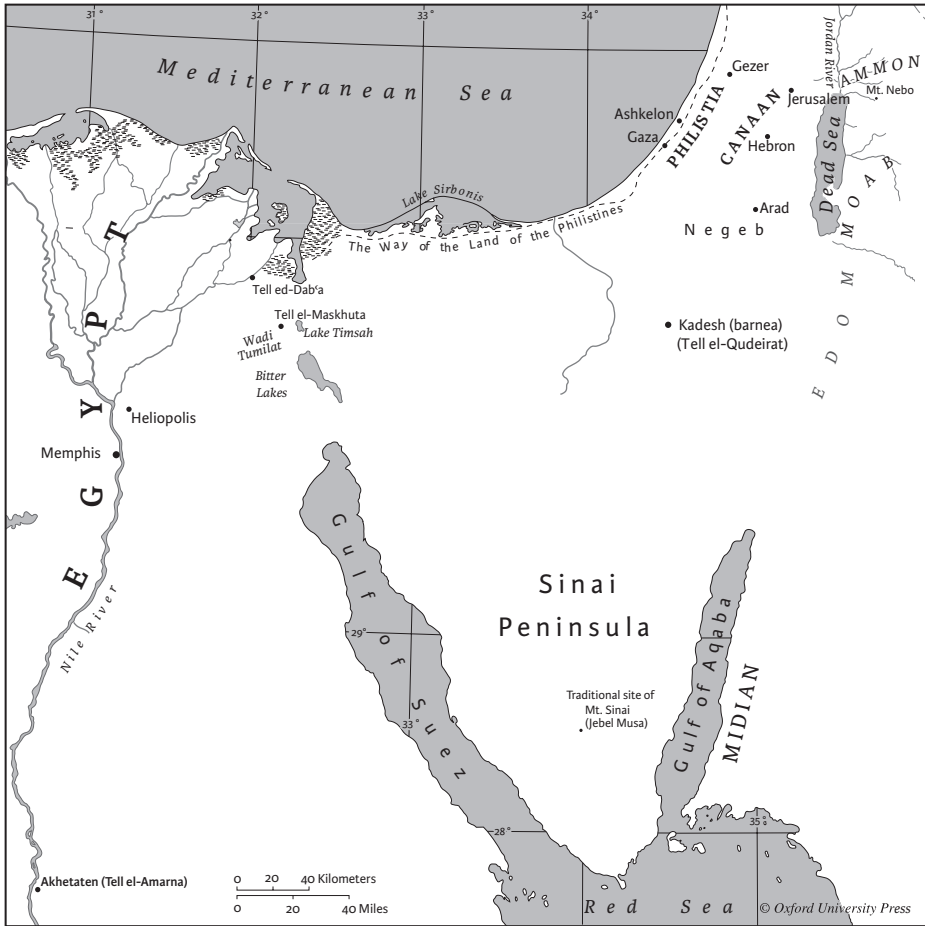
<sup>3</sup>Moses said to the people, “Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the LORD brought you out from there by strength of hand; no leavened bread shall be eaten.<sup>4</sup> Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out.<sup>5</sup> When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaan-

ites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your ancestors to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this observance in this month.<sup>6</sup> Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a festival to the LORD.<sup>7</sup> Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen in your possession, and no leaven shall be seen among you in all your territory.<sup>8</sup> You shall tell your child on that day, ‘It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’<sup>9</sup> It shall serve for you as a sign on your hand and as a reminder on your forehead, so that the teaching of the LORD may be on your lips; for with a strong hand the LORD brought you out of Egypt.<sup>10</sup> You shall keep this ordinance at its proper time from year to year.

<sup>11</sup>“When the LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, as he swore to you and your ancestors, and has given it to you,<sup>12</sup> you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb. All the firstborn of your livestock that are males shall be the LORD’s.<sup>13</sup> But every firstborn donkey you shall redeem with a sheep; if you do not redeem it, you must break its neck. Every firstborn male among your children you shall redeem.<sup>14</sup> When in the future your child asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall answer, ‘By strength of hand the LORD

*the passover* (also in Num 9.12 and probably Ex 13.10) is likely the title of a Priestly document containing rules for passover observance. *Foreigner*, non-Israelite living temporarily in the land. **44:** A *slave* who is *purchased* is *circumcised* and considered part of the household (Gen 17.12–13). **45:** *Bound or hired servant* denotes a temporary member of a household. **46:** *In one house*, see 12.4n. **47:** *Whole congregation*, see 12.3n. **48:** Unlike the “foreigner” of v. 43, an *alien* is usually a permanent, non-Israelite resident and must be *circumcised* in order to celebrate passover. Circumcision in this instance is not a conversion rite. **49:** *Law* (Heb “torah”) is better translated “instruction” or “teaching” (as 13.9; 18.20). *Native*, or citizen, that is Israelite. **51:** This verse resumes the narrative of vv. 37–41. *Company*, see 12.17n.

**13.1–16:** **More commemorative rituals: consecration of the firstborn, and unleavened bread festival.** **2:** *Consecration of the firstborn* reflects the special status of the first offspring of a woman or animal (see 4.22n.; 13.12n. 22.29–30; 34.19–20; Num 8.16–18). Its commemorative function is given in vv. 14–16. **3:** The charge to *remember* prescribes commemoration; see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n.. **4:** *Abib*, meaning “new grain,” is an older name for this springtime month; see 12.2n. **5:** See 3.8n. **8:** See 11.1–13.16n. and 12.24–27n. **9:** *Sign . . . forehead* (also v. 16; Deut 6.6–8) denotes metaphoric modes of commemoration (as Prov 6.20–21; 7.1–3), but is interpreted literally in post-exilic times, giving rise to the Jewish custom of phylacteries. *Reminder* (Heb “zikkaron”; sometimes translated “remembrance”) frequently invokes the commemorative function of ritual acts or objects (17.14; 28.12,29; 30.16; see also 11.1–13.16n. The phrase *teaching* (Heb “torah”) of the LORD appears for the first time in the Bible; see 12.49n. *Hand*, see 3.19n. **11:** Instructions for consecrating the firstborn resume. **12:** *Set apart to the LORD*, for the firstborn belong to God; see 4.22n. *Males*, specifying for the first time the gender of the firstborn to be consecrated. **13:** Because the *donkey* is a ritually impure animal (see Lev 11; Deut 14.3–21), it is redeemed by a pure one, a *sheep*; see also 34.20. The procedure for redeeming the human *firstborn male* is not specified. **14–15:** Linking the



**The Nile Delta and the Sinai Peninsula.** Tell el- Maskhuta and Tell ed-Dab'a have been identified as the cities of Pithom and Ramses. Jebel Musa in the southern Sinai Peninsula is the traditional identification of Mount Sinai, but that is questioned by most scholars.

brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery.<sup>15</sup> When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human firstborn to the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD every male that first opens the womb, but every firstborn of my sons I redeem.<sup>16</sup> It

shall serve as a sign on your hand and as an emblem<sup>a</sup> on your forehead that by strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt.”

<sup>17</sup> When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them by way of the land of the

<sup>a</sup> Or as a frontlet; meaning of Heb uncertain

consecration of the firstborn to the firstborn slain in the plague gives the custom a pedagogical function; see 10.2n. and 11.1–13.16n. 16: See v. 9n.

13.17–15.21: Journey to and through the sea, described in prose and poetry.

13.17–14.31: The narrative account, with its repetitions, contradictions, non sequiturs, and inconsistencies, is a composite. 13.17: *Way of the land of the Philistines*, the shortest land route from Egypt to Canaan, runs parallel to the Mediterranean coast toward southwest Canaan where the Philistines, an Aegean people, settled in the

Philistines, although that was nearer; for God thought, “If the people face war, they may change their minds and return to Egypt.”<sup>18</sup> So God led the people by the roundabout way of the wilderness toward the Red Sea.<sup>a</sup> The Israelites went up out of the land of Egypt prepared for battle.<sup>19</sup> And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, “God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here.”<sup>20</sup> They set out from Succoth, and camped at Etham, on the edge of the wilderness.<sup>21</sup> The LORD went in front of them in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, so that they might travel by day and by night.<sup>22</sup> Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

**14** Then the LORD said to Moses:<sup>2</sup> Tell the Israelites to turn back and camp in front of Pi-hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, in front of Baal-zephon; you shall camp opposite it, by the sea.<sup>3</sup> Pharaoh will say of the Israelites, “They are wandering aimlessly in the land; the wilderness has closed in on them.”<sup>4</sup> I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and he will pursue them, so that I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army; and the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD. And they did so.

<sup>5</sup> When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the minds of Pharaoh and his officials were changed toward the people, and they said, “What have we done, letting Israel leave our service?”<sup>6</sup> So he had his chariot

made ready, and took his army with him;<sup>7</sup> he took six hundred picked chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.<sup>8</sup> The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt and he pursued the Israelites, who were going out boldly.<sup>9</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, his chariot drivers and his army; they overtook them camped by the sea, by Pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-zephon.

<sup>10</sup> As Pharaoh drew near, the Israelites looked back, and there were the Egyptians advancing on them. In great fear the Israelites cried out to the LORD.<sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt?<sup>12</sup> Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”<sup>13</sup> But Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again.<sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you, and you have only to keep still.”

<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why do you cry out to me? Tell the Israelites to go forward.<sup>16</sup> But you lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the Israelites may go into the sea on dry ground.<sup>17</sup> Then I will harden the hearts

<sup>a</sup> Or *Sea of Reeds*

late thirteenth and early twelfth centuries BCE. **18:** *Roundabout way of the wilderness*, that is, not a specific route. This vague description fits the ahistorical character of the places along the way; see 12.37n. *Red Sea* (Heb “yam sup”), properly Reed Sea, likely designates the reedy marshes of northeastern Egypt. The following miraculous sea-splitting account (14.21–29) does not fit the marshland referent and reflects a different, perhaps imaginary or mythological, sea tradition. *Battle*, in keeping with the military language for the journeying Israelites; see 6.26n. **19:** Gen 50.24–26. **20:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. **21:** *Pillar of cloud and pillar of fire*, probably one column manifesting the divine presence, shielded by a cloud by day and fire at night; see 3.2n. **14.1:** *Moses* acts alone, without Aaron, in the sea-crossing episode. **2:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. *Sea*, see 13.18n. **4:** *Harden*, by God; see 4.21n. *Glory*, better “power” and thus “authority” (also v. 17). *Know*, see 5.2n. **7:** *Six hundred*, perhaps a stock military unit (cf. Judg 18.11), provides a 1:1000 ratio with the Israelite infantry (12.37n.). **8:** *Hardened* by God; see 4.21n. **9:** *Pursued* . . . *overtook* is formulaic language (15.9; Deut 19.6; etc.). **10:** *Cried*, see 2.23n. **11–12:** For the first but not the last time the Israelites complain in a crisis situation, challenging Moses’s authority (15.24; 16.2–3; 17.3; and frequently in Numbers). **14:** *The LORD will fight* introduces the mythic concept of the Divine Warrior, based on the Canaanite deity Baal who battles watery chaos often depicted as a sea monster. The image is used in the Bible to represent divine might wielded to save Israel (v. 25; 15.3; Deut 20.4; 1 Sam 17.47; Zech 9.13–14.) **16:** *Moses’s staff* (see 4.17n.) is not mentioned in vv. 21, 26, 27. **17:** *Harden* appears

of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them; and so I will gain glory for myself over Pharaoh and all his army, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.<sup>18</sup> And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained glory for myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his chariot drivers.”

<sup>19</sup> The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them.

<sup>20</sup> It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided.<sup>22</sup> The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers.<sup>24</sup> At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic.<sup>25</sup> He clogged<sup>a</sup> their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

<sup>26</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.”<sup>27</sup> So

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea.<sup>28</sup> The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.<sup>29</sup> But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

<sup>30</sup> Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore.<sup>31</sup> Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

**15** Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

“I will sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD is my strength and my might,<sup>b</sup> and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.

<sup>3</sup> The LORD is a warrior;  
the LORD is his name.

<sup>4</sup> “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he cast into the sea;

<sup>a</sup> Sam Gk Syr: MT *removed*

<sup>b</sup> Or *song*

for the last time; see 4.21n. *Glory*, see v.4n. **18:** *Know*, see 5.2n. **19–20:** *Angel* and *pillar*, both manifestations of God’s presence (see 3.2n. and 13.21n.), likely from different sources. **21:** *Wind*, *dry land*, and *divided waters*, which evoke creation (Gen 1.2,6,9; cf. Gen 8.2), are from a Priestly hand. **22:** This verse is repeated almost verbatim in v. 29, framing vv. 23–28 and indicating that as the Israelites were fleeing, the Egyptians were pursuing them. **24:** *Pillar*, see 3.2n. **29:** This verse repeats v. 22 (see v. 22n.). *Dry ground* . . . *sea* reverses the *sea* . . . *dry ground* of v. 22, forming a chiasm and further framing the intervening narrative. **31:** The Heb for *believed* means to “trust” in God rather than to affirm God’s existence.

**15.1–21: The Song of the Sea** is a lyric victory hymn generally considered an originally independent composition, one of the oldest literary units in the Bible, perhaps from the twelfth century BCE. Influenced by mythic accounts of the Divine Warrior’s battle with watery chaos (see 14.14n.), it is rich in metaphors and terms that preclude single explanations and at times even defy comprehension; in many details it diverges from the prose account in ch 14. **1:** Although attributed here to *Moses*, this poem was originally attributed to Miriam, given the association of women with the victory song genre (see v. 20n.); *I* need not be Moses. **2:** *The LORD* . . . *salvation*, a hymnic bicolon appearing (perhaps as a quotation) in Isa 12.2 and Ps 118.14. *My father’s God*, Israel’s ancestral deity (3.6,13,15; 4.5; 6.2–4). **3:** *Warrior*, see 14.14n. *Name*, see 3.13–15n. **4:** *Red Sea*, see 13.18n.

his picked officers were sunk in the Red Sea.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>5</sup>The floods covered them; they went down into the depths like a stone.

<sup>6</sup>Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power— your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy.

<sup>7</sup>In the greatness of your majesty you overthrew your adversaries; you sent out your fury, it consumed them like stubble.

<sup>8</sup>At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up, the floods stood up in a heap; the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea.

<sup>9</sup>The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil, my desire shall have its fill of them.

I will draw my sword, my hand shall destroy them.’

<sup>10</sup>You blew with your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

<sup>11</sup>“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders?

<sup>12</sup>You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them.

<sup>13</sup>“In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed; you guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

<sup>14</sup>The peoples heard, they trembled; pangs seized the inhabitants of Philistia.

<sup>15</sup>Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; trembling seized the leaders of Moab; all the inhabitants of Canaan melted away.

<sup>16</sup>Terror and dread fell upon them; by the might of your arm, they became still as a stone until your people, O LORD, passed by, until the people whom you acquired passed by.

<sup>17</sup>You brought them in and planted them on the mountain of your own possession, the place, O LORD, that you made your abode,

<sup>a</sup> Or *Sea of Reeds*

5: *Floods*, in Heb the plural of the term that denotes watery chaos (“deep”) in Gen 1.2. 6: The *right hand* of God (also v. 12), not Moses’s hand (as 14.16,21,26), directly vanquishes the enemy; see 3.19n. 7: *Consumed* . . . *stubble* evokes imagery of fire, which is sometimes paired with water as elements of devastation (Isa 43.2,16–17). 8: *Blast of your nostrils*, poetic language for a strong wind (v. 10), usually destructive (see Job 4.9). 9: *Pursue* . . . *overtake*, see 14.9n. 11: *Among the gods* may be language of Israelite monolatry, in which the existence of other gods is acknowledged (18.11; 20.3; 23.32–33). Another possibility is that *gods* denotes lesser divine manifestations or angels in God’s heavenly court (Pss 82.1; 89.5–8). Either way, the rhetorical questions of this verse highlight the incomparability of Israel’s god. 12: *Right hand*, see 15.6n. *Earth*, seemingly incompatible with water imagery, refers to the underworld (Sheol, the abode of the dead), which swallows the living (Num 16.32; Isa 29.4; Prov 1.12). 13: *Love*, Heb *hesed*, which also connotes “kindness” and especially “faithfulness.” *Holy abode* may refer to God’s heavenly dwelling (as do the terms of v. 17b) or mythical home in the north (Ps 48.1–2); but it perhaps also alludes to the Promised Land as God’s mountainous possession (v. 17a; Ps 78.54–55) and to the Israelites as God’s sanctuary (Ps 114.1–2). If this is not a premonarchic poem, it may also refer to the Jerusalem Temple (v. 17b). 14: *Philistia*, see 13.17n. 15: The Transjordanian kingdoms of *Edom* and *Moab*, along with many *inhabitants of Canaan*, are enemies of the Israelites. 16: *Arm*, instead of “hand” (see 15.6n.), as in 6.6. *Passed by*, better “crossed,” has many possible meanings, all valid: crossing the sea, the wilderness, the Jordan, or mythically crossing to God’s mountain. 17: This verse contains overlapping and multileveled imagery similar to that of ancient Canaanite poetry (see 15.13n.). *Mountain of your possession* can refer to Israel’s homeland in Canaan, conceptualized as God’s inheritance (see v. 13n.; 34.9; cf. Isa 2.3). *Abode*, not the same Heb word as for “abode” in v. 13, designates God’s heavenly throne. *Sanctuary*, lit., “holy place,” is never used in 1 Kings for the Jerusalem Temple; and elsewhere it designates places or objects possessing sanctity, including celestial dwell-



the sanctuary, O LORD, that your hands have established.

<sup>18</sup> The LORD will reign forever and ever.”

<sup>19</sup> When the horses of Pharaoh with his chariots and his chariot drivers went into the sea, the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them; but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

<sup>20</sup> Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing. <sup>21</sup> And Miriam sang to them:

“Sing to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously;  
horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.”

<sup>22</sup> Then Moses ordered Israel to set out from the Red Sea,<sup>a</sup> and they went into the wilderness of Shur. They went three days in the wilderness and found no water. <sup>23</sup> When they came to Marah, they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter. That is why it was called Marah.<sup>b</sup> <sup>24</sup> And the people complained against Moses, saying, “What shall we drink?” <sup>25</sup> He cried out to the LORD; and the LORD showed him a piece of wood;<sup>c</sup>

he threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.

There the LORD<sup>d</sup> made for them a statute and an ordinance and there he put them to the test. <sup>26</sup> He said, “If you will listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God, and do what is right in his sight, and give heed to his commandments and keep all his statutes, I will not bring upon you any of the diseases that I brought upon the Egyptians; for I am the LORD who heals you.”

<sup>27</sup> Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees; and they camped there by the water.

**16** The whole congregation of the Israelites set out from Elim; and Israel came to the wilderness of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had departed from the land of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. <sup>3</sup> The Israelites

<sup>a</sup> Or *Sea of Reeds*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Bitterness*

<sup>c</sup> Or *a tree*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *he*

ings of deities (see 25.9n.). *Your hands have established* indicates that God made the sanctuary, implying that it is the heavenly one, not the copy constructed in Jerusalem by humans; or it could give God credit for building the earthly shrine (cf. Ps 78.69). **18:** *Reign* introduces for the first time the prominent biblical metaphor of God as king. **19–21:** A brief narrative with a final poetic section. **19:** A summary of 14.23–29. **20:** The title *prophet* is used for Miriam (whose name appears here for the first time), perhaps because her utterances are in the form of an inspired musical performance (cf. Deborah, Judg 4.4; 5, but not for Moses in Exodus. *Tambourine* is an anachronistic translation of Heb *top*, a small handheld frame drum (without jingles) played mainly by women in the ancient Near East. *All the women . . . dancing* indicate a woman’s performance genre—usually involving drums, dance, and song—for victory celebrations (1 Sam 18.6–7; Jer 31.4,13). **21:** This poem, similar to 15.1, may be an abbreviation or title of 15.1–18, originally a composition of Miriam later attributed to Moses (see 15.1n.).

**15.22–24.18. Sinai and covenant.** Facing recurrent difficulties, the Israelites cross the wilderness to Sinai (15.22–18.27) where they experience a theophany (ch 19) and enter into the covenant (chs 20–24).

**15.22–18.27: Crises and reorganization in the wilderness.** The journey resumes; four crises—two water shortages, lack of food, and military threat—foreshadowing the difficulties of life in Canaan, and a meeting with Jethro.

**15.22–27: First crisis, lack of water.** **22–23:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n. **22: Red Sea**, see 13.18n. **24: Complained**, see 14.11–12n. **25a:** Moses carries out a magical act, **25b: Statute . . . ordinance**, necessary because a community cannot exist without regulations; see 21.1–22.17n. The wilderness crises test Israelites (also 16.4) and God (17.2,7); see Deut 8.1–3,16. **26: Diseases**, although not used in the marvels episodes (7.8–10.29), may allude to them or to general Egyptian maladies or to both; cf. Deut 28.27. *Heals you*, better “your healer,” an epithet that may derive from Canaanite myth. **27:** Next stage of the journey; see 12.37n.

**16.1–36: Second crisis, lack of food** (cf. Num 11). **1:** Next stage of the journey, see 12.37n. *Fifteenth day . . . second month* is a month after departing Egypt (12.17–18). The name *Sinai* appears for the first time (see 3.1n., 3.2n., and 19.1n.). **2: Complained**, see 14.11–12n. **3: Hand of the LORD**, see 9.3n. *Fleshpots* (referring to meat) and



said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

<sup>4</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not.” <sup>5</sup> On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.” <sup>6</sup> So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the LORD who brought you out of the land of Egypt, <sup>7</sup> and in the morning you shall see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your complaining against the LORD. For what are we, that you complain against us?” <sup>8</sup> And Moses said, “When the LORD gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the LORD has heard the complaining that you utter against him—what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the LORD.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.’” <sup>10</sup> And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud. <sup>11</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses and said, <sup>12</sup> “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God.’”

<sup>13</sup> In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there

was a layer of dew around the camp. <sup>14</sup> When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. <sup>15</sup> When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?”<sup>a</sup> For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the LORD has given you to eat. <sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.’”

<sup>17</sup> The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. <sup>18</sup> But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed. <sup>19</sup> And Moses said to them, “Let no one leave any of it over until morning.”

<sup>20</sup> But they did not listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. <sup>21</sup> Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.

<sup>22</sup> On the sixth day they gathered twice as much food, two omers apiece. When all the leaders of the congregation came and told Moses, <sup>23</sup> he said to them, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Tomorrow is a day of solemn rest, a holy sabbath to the LORD; bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil, and all that is left over put aside to be kept until morning.’” <sup>24</sup> So they put it aside until morning, as Moses commanded them; and it did not become foul, and there were no worms in it. <sup>25</sup> Moses said, “Eat it today, for today is a sabbath to the LORD; today you will not find it in the field. <sup>26</sup> Six days you

<sup>a</sup> Or “It is manna” (Heb *man hu*, see verse 31)

*bread*, their food in Egypt, will be matched by quails (v. 13) and bread (v. 4; or manna, vv. 15,31) in the wilderness.

4: This *test* (see 15.25n.) may be about obeying God’s instructions (Heb “torah”; see 12.49n.) and about believing God will provide for them. 6: To *know* God here (and v. 12) is to recognize that God can miraculously provide sustenance; cf. 5.2n. 7: The phrase *glory of the LORD*, a technical Priestly phrase signifying God’s physical presence (within a cloud, v. 10), appears for the first time in the Bible (also 24.16,17; 40.34,35; cf. 33.18n.); see 3.2n. 9: Aaron again speaks for Moses; see 4.15–16n. 12: *Know*, see 16.6n. 13: *Dew*, like rain, signifies divine favor (e.g., Gen 27.28), both essential for agriculture in ancient Israel. 16: *Omer*, see 16.36n. 19: This will indicate trust in God. 23–30: Instructions for the *sabbath* as a *day of rest* on the *seventh day* (cf. Gen 2.2–3) precede the Decalogue’s sabbath commandment (see 20.8–11n.); sabbath observance is part of Israel’s learning to obey God (see 16.4n.; see also 20.8–11; 23.12; 31.12–17; 34.21; 35.1–3). Thus the sabbath as part of the world order is introduced

shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is a sabbath, there will be none.”

<sup>27</sup> On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none.

<sup>28</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? <sup>29</sup> See! The LORD has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” <sup>30</sup> So the people rested on the seventh day.

<sup>31</sup> The house of Israel called it manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

<sup>32</sup> Moses said, “This is what the LORD has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they may see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” <sup>33</sup> And Moses said to Aaron, “Take a jar, and put an omer of manna in it, and place it before the LORD, to be kept throughout your generations.” <sup>34</sup> As the LORD commanded Moses, so Aaron placed it before the covenant,<sup>a</sup> for safekeeping. <sup>35</sup> The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a habitable land; they ate manna, until they came to the border of the land of Canaan.

<sup>36</sup> An omer is a tenth of an ephah.

**17** From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the LORD commanded.

They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. <sup>2</sup> The people quarreled with Moses, and said, “Give us water to drink.” Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?” <sup>3</sup> But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?” <sup>4</sup> So Moses cried out to the LORD, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” <sup>5</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. <sup>6</sup> I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink.” Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup> He called the place Massah<sup>b</sup> and Meribah,<sup>c</sup> because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

<sup>8</sup> Then Amalek came and fought with Israel at Rephidim. <sup>9</sup> Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some men for us and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the staff of God in my hand.” <sup>10</sup> So Joshua did as Moses told him, and fought

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>b</sup> That is *Test*

<sup>c</sup> That is *Quarrel*

through the manna episode. **31:** *House of Israel*, see 40.34n. “What is it?” (Heb “man hu”) in v. 15 provides an etymology for *manna*, which cannot be identified and may be a mythic substance (cf. Num 11.7–9; Ps 78.25; Wis 16.20). **32:** *Kept throughout your generations* alludes to an otherwise unknown commemorative ritual; see 11.1–13.16n. **33–34:** *Covenant*, elliptical for the not-yet-announced “ark of the covenant” (25.10–22), is parallel to *LORD* (v. 33), indicating that the ark signifies God’s presence (see 25.17–22n.). Cf. Heb 9.4. **35:** *Forty years*, the first mention of the length of the wilderness sojourn. **36:** *Ephah* (ca. 21 qts [23 L]) and *omer* (2 qts [2.3 liters]) are dry measures, usually for grain.

**17.1–7:** *Third crisis, lack of water* (cf. Num 20.2–13). **1:** Further stages of the journey; see 12.27n. **2–3:** The people *complain* again (see 14.11–12n.). The synonym *quarrel* (Heb “rib”) provides an etymology for Meribah (v. 7). Similarly, *test* (Heb “nissah”) provides an etymology for Massah (v. 7). **6:** *Water* coming from a *rock* at the mountain *Horeb* (see 3.1n.) invokes mythic imagery of the cosmic mountain, the divine home and source of all water. **7:** *Among us*, or “with you/us,” an expression denoting God’s potent presence, which provides food or water and protection for Israelites.

**17.8–16. Fourth crisis, military threat.** **8:** *Amalek* refers to a seminomadic group and habitual enemy of Israel (v. 16; Deut 25.17–19; Judg 6.1–3; 1 Sam 15; etc.). Amalekites are not attested in nonbiblical sources. **9:** Moses’s successor *Joshua*, whose name appears seven times in Exodus, is first mentioned here. Moses’s *staff* can secure military victory (as in the sea crossing, 14.16) and produce water (17.5–6) or make it undrinkable (7.15–19); see 4.20n. **10:** *Hur*, an associate of Moses and Aaron (also 24.14), is likely a Levite here, but is a Judahite in 31.2.

with Amalek, while Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>Whenever Moses held up his hand, Israel prevailed; and whenever he lowered his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup>But Moses' hands grew weary; so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; so his hands were steady until the sun set. <sup>13</sup>And Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the sword.

<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven." <sup>15</sup>And Moses built an altar and called it, The LORD is my banner. <sup>16</sup>He said, "A hand upon the banner of the LORD!<sup>a</sup> The LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

**18** Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.

<sup>2</sup>After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro took her back, <sup>3</sup>along with her two sons. The name of the one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been an alien<sup>b</sup> in a foreign land"), <sup>4</sup>and the name of the other, Eliezer<sup>c</sup> (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"). <sup>5</sup>Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came into the wilderness where Moses was encamped at the mountain of God, bringing Moses' sons and wife to him. <sup>6</sup>He sent word to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you, with your wife and her two sons." <sup>7</sup>Moses went out to meet

his father-in-law; he bowed down and kissed him; each asked after the other's welfare, and they went into the tent. <sup>8</sup>Then Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had beset them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them.

<sup>9</sup>Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the LORD had done to Israel, in delivering them from the Egyptians.

<sup>10</sup>Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. <sup>11</sup>Now I know that the LORD is greater than all gods, because he delivered the people from the Egyptians,<sup>d</sup> when they dealt arrogantly with them." <sup>12</sup>And Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses' father-in-law in the presence of God.

<sup>13</sup>The next day Moses sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening. <sup>14</sup>When Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you sit alone, while all the people stand around you from morning until evening?" <sup>15</sup>Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. <sup>16</sup>When they have a dispute, they come to me and I decide between one person and another, and I make

<sup>a</sup> Cn: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *ger*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *Eli*, my God; *ezer*, help

<sup>d</sup> The clause *because . . . Egyptians* has been transposed from verse 10

**14:** The instruction to *write* is the first biblical mention of Israelite literacy. *Reminder* and *remembrance*, indications of the commemorative aspects of the Exodus story; see 13.9n.; cf. 11.1–13.16n. *Book*, better "document." *Recite* gives oral form to written recollections. **15–16:** Constructing an *altar* may be a third commemorative act.

**18.1–27: Meeting with Jethro**, who solves an organizational crisis. **1:** *Jethro*, see 2.18n. *Father-in-law*, Heb *hoten*, connotes marriage as a bond between a man and his wife's father and thus between two families, not just a bond between the conjugal pair; its frequent and redundant use in ch 18 thus emphasizes the Israelites' connection with the Midianites. **2:** *Sent away* to her father for safety; he thus *took her back*, accepted her. **3–4:** *Gershom's* symbolic name appears in 2.22 but *Eliezer's* only here. **5:** *Mountain of God*, i.e., Sinai/Horeb (see 3.1n.). Another tradition (19.2) implies that the Israelites reach the mountain after the Jethro episode. **10–12:** As a priest (v. 1, see 2.16n.) who blesses the LORD, acknowledges the LORD (see 5.2n.) as greater than other deities (see 15.11n.), and sacrifices to the LORD, Jethro may reflect Midianite familiarity with this deity; see 3.15n. **12:** *Eat bread* denotes a communal sacrificial meal binding the Israelites, Jethro, and God (see 24.5n). **13–27** (cf. Deut 1.9–18): Rendering justice will be the responsibility of a hierarchy of administrative officials (vv. 13,22; NRSV

known to them the statutes and instructions of God.”<sup>17</sup> Moses’ father-in-law said to him, “What you are doing is not good.<sup>18</sup> You will surely wear yourself out, both you and these people with you. For the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.<sup>19</sup> Now listen to me. I will give you counsel, and God be with you! You should represent the people before God, and you should bring their cases before God;<sup>20</sup> teach them the statutes and instructions and make known to them the way they are to go and the things they are to do.<sup>21</sup> You should also look for able men among all the people, men who fear God, are trustworthy, and hate dishonest gain; set such men over them as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.<sup>22</sup> Let them sit as judges for the people at all times; let them bring every important case to you, but decide every minor case themselves. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.<sup>23</sup> If you do this, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all these people will go to their home in peace.”

<sup>24</sup> So Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said.<sup>25</sup> Moses chose able men from all Israel and appointed them as heads over the people, as officers over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens.<sup>26</sup> And they judged the people at all times; hard cases they brought to Moses, but any minor case they decided themselves.<sup>27</sup> Then

Moses let his father-in-law depart, and he went off to his own country.

**19** On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai.<sup>2</sup> They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain.<sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God; the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: <sup>4</sup> You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.<sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine,<sup>6</sup> but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

<sup>7</sup> So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him.<sup>8</sup> The people all answered as one: “Everything that the LORD has spoken we will do.” Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.<sup>9</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”

“judges”). In the retelling of this episode in Deut 1.9–18, the initiative is Moses’s alone. **20:** *Statutes*, see 15.25b n. *Instructions* (Heb “torot,” pl. of “torah”), see 12.49n. **26:** *Case*, Heb *dabar*, also, “thing, word, matter,” uses a root (“dbr”) that appears ten times in ch 18, anticipating the ten “words” of the Decalogue; see 20.1–17n.

**19.1–25:** *Revelation at the mountain.* God’s second appearance at Sinai/Horeb (cf. ch 3) is a composite of traditions, at times contradictory or redundant, together conveying the mystery of this momentous theophany. Sinai/Horeb is depicted as an earthly manifestation of the cosmic mountain (see 17.6n.), axis of the mythic connection between divine and human realms. **1:** The location of *Sinai* (or Horeb; see 3.1n.) is uncertain. Some passages (Deut 33.2; Judg 5.4; Hab 3.3,7) locate it in southern Jordan; the traditional site in the southern Sinai Peninsula (see map on p. 101) is unlikely. **3:** *House of Jacob* is parallel with “sons of Israel” (*Israelites*), the two names of the ancestor of the twelve tribes (Gen 32.28). **4:** The reminder of God’s past actions for the Israelites, as preface to the covenant, is typical of Near Eastern treaties between a stronger and a weaker king, in which the overlord states past benefactions; also 20.2. *Eagle’s wings*, image of parental protection and nurturance (Deut 32.11–13). **5:** *Obey . . . keep* signifies the people’s responsibility to the god who saved them, thus anticipating the Sinai *covenant*, first mentioned here (cf. 2.24; 6.4–5). The concept of a pact or covenant between God and Israel is a theologized form of Near Eastern treaty agreements in which a ruler is the patron of a vassal, who has obligations in return. Unlike most vassals, Israel will have special status as its overlord’s *treasured possession* (Deut 7.6; 14.2; 26.18). **6:** *Priestly kingdom . . . holy nation* poetically presents all Israelites as priests: they will have privileges of intimacy with God and responsibilities of physical and moral purity. **8:** This unanimous agreement is reaffirmed after the covenant is presented (24.7). **9:** *Cloud*, see 3.2n. *Hear*, denoting an auditory the-

When Moses had told the words of the people to the LORD,<sup>10</sup> the LORD said to Moses: “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes<sup>11</sup> and prepare for the third day, because on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people.<sup>12</sup> You shall set limits for the people all around, saying, ‘Be careful not to go up the mountain or to touch the edge of it. Any who touch the mountain shall be put to death.<sup>13</sup> No hand shall touch them, but they shall be stoned or shot with arrows;<sup>a</sup> whether animal or human being, they shall not live.’ When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they may go up on the mountain.”<sup>14</sup> So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes.<sup>15</sup> And he said to the people, “Prepare for the third day; do not go near a woman.”<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled.<sup>17</sup> Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. They took their stand at the foot of the mountain.<sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD had descended upon it

in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently.<sup>19</sup> As the blast of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses would speak and God would answer him in thunder.<sup>20</sup> When the LORD descended upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain, the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.<sup>21</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people not to break through to the LORD to look; otherwise many of them will perish.<sup>22</sup> Even the priests who approach the LORD must consecrate themselves or the LORD will break out against them.”<sup>23</sup> Moses said to the LORD, “The people are not permitted to come up to Mount Sinai; for you yourself warned us, saying, ‘Set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.’”<sup>24</sup> The LORD said to him, “Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let either the priests or the people break through to come up to the LORD; otherwise he will break out against them.”<sup>25</sup> So Moses went down to the people and told them.

**20** Then God spoke all these words:  
<sup>2</sup>I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of

<sup>a</sup> Heb lacks *with arrows*

ophany; v. 11 implies a visual one. The people will truly *trust* Moses when they hear him converse directly with God (v. 19; cf. 4.1–9; 14.31n.) and then will accept what God communicates to them through Moses. **10–15:** God’s presence will render the mountain intensely holy and too dangerous for people (cf. 24.11) to approach (see 3.6n.); even being at a slight remove requires purification. **10:** *People*, perhaps only men; see v. 15n. *Consecrate*, that is, make ritually fit to approach divine sanctity (Josh 3.5); *wash*, an antidote to ritual impurity (see 29.4). **12:** *Limits* (and v. 23), the border around dangerous sanctity. *Death*, because the intense holiness of God’s presence has a dangerous quality (also v. 21; 20.19); see 24.9–11n. and Num 4.15. **13:** *Go up on the mountain* differs from v. 12, in which the people do not ascend the mountain. **14:** *Consecrated . . . washed*, see v. 10n. **15:** *Go near a woman*, that is, have sex, which causes ritual impurity (Lev 15.18). Addressed to men, this seems to exclude women from experiencing the theophany; but see 20.1–17n. **16–19:** Intense natural phenomena—*thunder*, *lightning*, a thick *cloud*, dense *smoke*, *violent* shaking—together connote the extraordinary phenomenon of revelation (Judg 5.4–5; Pss 18.7–15; 68.7–8; Hab 3.3–6; cf. 1 Kings 19.11–13). A blaring *trumpet*, otherwise used to herald sovereigns (as 1 Kings 1.34) or signal momentous (as 1 Sam 13.3; Isa 18.3) and sacred (as Lev 25.9) events, augments the sensory images. **20–25:** Three zones of sanctity are established: holiest at the top for God and Moses (vv. 20,24); a middle stage for Aaron (v. 24) and perhaps leaders (v. 22; 24.1–2,9–11); least holy at the bottom for the people (vv. 12,17,21,23). These zones correspond to the tabernacle’s three levels of holiness (see 25.1–31.17n.).

**20.1–24.18: Covenant.** The stipulations of the covenant—Decalogue (20.1–17) and covenant rules (20.22–23.19)—are interspersed with additional Sinai narratives (20.18–21; 23.20–24.18).

**20.1–17: Decalogue** (also Deut 5.6–21). These “Ten Commandments,” also found with some variations in Deuteronomy 5, are not numbered or titled here but are later called “ten words,” that is, “ten sayings” or “ten matters” in 34.28; Deut 4.13; 10.4 (see 18.26n.; 35.1n.). Set forth in apodictic (absolute) form, they are not universal laws nor a concise summary of biblical law. Rather, they are unconditional community precepts, both injunctions and prohi-

the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> you shall have no other gods before<sup>a</sup> me.

<sup>4</sup> You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of

those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation<sup>b</sup> of those who love me and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup> You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

<sup>a</sup> Or *besides*

<sup>b</sup> Or *to thousands*

bitions, rather than laws, which typically have punishments. Unlike any other ancient Near Eastern materials, the Decalogue creates moral standards for a society; obedience is to be a function of divine authority, not fear of punishment. Containing more than ten statements, and not numbered in the Bible, they are counted in diverse ways.

NUMBERING OF THE DECALOGUE IN EXODUS 20.1–17			
	MOST JEWISH TRADITIONS	EASTERN ORTHODOX, ANGLICAN, MOST PROTESTANT CHURCHES	ROMAN CATHOLIC AND LUTHERAN CHURCHES
Ex 20.2 (divine self-identification)	1	prologue	1
20.3 (other gods)	2	1	1
20.4–6 (idols)	2	2	1
20.7 (divine name)	3	3	2
20.8–11 (sabbath)	4	4	3
20.12 (parents)	5	5	4
20.13 (murder)	6	6	5
20.14 (adultery)	7	7	6
20.15 (theft)	8	8	7
20.16 (perjury)	9	9	8
20.17a (coveting)	10	10	9
20.17b (coveting)	10	10	10

The first several deal with human obligations to God and are accompanied by motive clauses (explanations); the others concern social issues and usually do not mention God. Because its pronouns are all second-person masculine singular, the Decalogue seems to address individually adult men responsible for land-holding Israelite households with servants (as v. 17), with its stipulations otherwise applying to all people as appropriate. Yet, in Hebrew the masculine singular can be inclusive; cf. v. 10 (and see Gen 2.24). 1: *God spoke* these words to the people directly, not through Moses. 2: Divine self-identification and recapitulation of past benefaction (see 19.4n.). 3: Worship of the LORD alone, without denying other deities; see 15.11n. 4–6: Worship of God without anthropomorphic images perhaps distinguished Israelite religion from those of their neighbors. 4: *Idol* (Heb “pesel”), a carved image; cf. 34.17n. 5: *Jealous* (or “zealous”) *God* is a recurring phrase (also 34.14; Deut 4.24; 5.9; 6.15) indicating God’s passionate resolve to deal with those worshiping other deities. *To the . . . generation*, transgenerational guilt (see 34.7; cf. Gen 15.16) is sometimes rejected (Jer 31.29–30; Ezek 18). 7: God’s *name*, which represents God’s presence (20.24; Deut 5.12; etc.), is potent and cannot be misused (as in false oaths,



<sup>8</sup>Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.  
<sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor and do all your work.  
<sup>10</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

<sup>12</sup>Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

<sup>13</sup>You shall not murder.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>14</sup>You shall not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>You shall not steal.

<sup>16</sup>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

<sup>17</sup>You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's

wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

<sup>18</sup>When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid<sup>b</sup> and trembled and stood at a distance, <sup>19</sup>and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." <sup>20</sup>Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." <sup>21</sup>Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

<sup>22</sup>The LORD said to Moses: Thus you shall say to the Israelites: "You have seen for your-

<sup>a</sup> Or *kill*

<sup>b</sup> Sam Gk Syr Vg: MT *they saw*

Jer 7.9). **8:** The *sabbath* is to be *holy* (v. 8; the same Heb word is translated *consecrated* in v. 11), that is, distinct from other days (see 16.23–30n.), and is directed to God as creator (v. 11, as in the Priestly creation story [Gen 1.1–2.3]; contrast Deut 5.15). **8:** *Remember* (contrast Deut 5.12) suggests that memory involves action. **9:** *Work*, perhaps skilled work, though the term is never defined in any sabbath legislation; however, cooking is implied in ch 35.1–3 (see 35.3n.). **10:** "Wife" is omitted from the otherwise inclusive list of seven entities enjoined to observe the sabbath, perhaps because she is included in *you*; see 20.1–17n. **12:** Parental authority, akin to that of God, likewise deserves *honor* (see 14.4n., where "glory" is from the same root as *honor*, and 21.15,17n.). **13:** *Murder* is forbidden, but not killing in war or in capital punishment. **14:** *Adultery*, sexual intercourse between a man and a married or betrothed woman, is a grave offense (Lev 20.10; Deut 22.22) because lineages could be compromised by this infidelity. **15:** Theft of both persons and property is prohibited; the Heb word for "kidnap" (21.16) is the same as for *steal*. **16:** Forbidding *false witness* indicates strong concerns for justice (23.1–3). **17:** Considered two separate precepts in some traditions (cf. Deut 5.21), this one addresses the male head of household; see 20.1–17n. Forbidding the mental process of coveting, the cause of the transgressions of adultery and theft (already prohibited in vv. 14 and 15), is unusual; but the intense emotional state of *covet* (Heb root "ḥmd") here implies the results of that state as well as the state itself (see Mic 2.1–2). *Covet* appears twice in succession; first before the general category *house* (better "household"), and the second before an enumeration of some of a household's components.

**20.18–21:** The Sinai account resumes, with the people insisting that Moses transmit God's word. **18:** *Thunder . . . lightning . . . trumpet . . . smoking*, see 19.16–19n. **19:** *Die*, see 19.13n.

**20.22–23.33:** **Community regulations.** This collection of legal materials, called "book of the covenant" [Heb "sefer ha-berit"] (24.7) or "Covenant Code" or "Covenant Collection," has affinities of form and content with other ancient law legal traditions. A discrete scribal collection, with laws—especially agricultural ones and those mentioning houses—inapplicable to a wilderness setting, it was likely incorporated into the Sinai narrative to afford it divine authority. The oldest of the legal materials in the Pentateuch, many of its stipulations probably arose in premonarchic village settings. Introductory instructions (20.22–26) and a concluding narrative (23.20–33) frame a two-part enumeration of legal materials. The first part (21.1–22.17) consists mainly of casuistic materials (case laws with attached punishments). The second part (22.18–23.19) comprises ethical or religious norms and exhortations typically expressed in apodictic or absolute form. These two parts may reflect the merging of ancient customary regulations with covenant-oriented materials.

**20.22–26:** **Introductory instructions** in the second-person plural. The forbidden statues (see 20.4–5) made of costly *silver* and *gold* are contrasted with simple, low sacrificial altars of *earth* or unhewn *stones*. Sacrifice can



selves that I spoke with you from heaven.  
<sup>23</sup>You shall not make gods of silver alongside me, nor shall you make for yourselves gods of gold.  
<sup>24</sup>You need make for me only an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your offerings of well-being, your sheep and your oxen; in every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you.  
<sup>25</sup>But if you make for me an altar of stone, do not build it of hewn stones; for if you use a chisel upon it you profane it.  
<sup>26</sup>You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.”

**21** These are the ordinances that you shall set before them:

<sup>2</sup>When you buy a male Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall go out a free person, without debt.  
<sup>3</sup>If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him.  
<sup>4</sup>If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master’s and he shall go out alone.  
<sup>5</sup>But if the slave declares, “I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out a free person,”  
<sup>6</sup>then his master shall bring him before God.<sup>a</sup> He shall be brought to the door or the doorpost; and his master shall

pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for life.

<sup>7</sup>When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do.  
<sup>8</sup>If she does not please her master, who designated her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt unfairly with her.  
<sup>9</sup>If he designates her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter.  
<sup>10</sup>If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish the food, clothing, or marital rights of the first wife.<sup>b</sup>  
<sup>11</sup>And if he does not do these three things for her, she shall go out without debt, without payment of money.

<sup>12</sup>Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death.  
<sup>13</sup>If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God, then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee.  
<sup>14</sup>But if someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.

<sup>15</sup>Whoever strikes father or mother shall be put to death.

<sup>16</sup>Whoever kidnaps a person, whether that person has been sold or is still held in possession, shall be put to death.

<sup>a</sup> Or to the judges

<sup>b</sup> Heb of her

take place wherever people invoke God’s *name* (presence); contrast 27.1–8 and the single “place” for sacrifice in Deuteronomy (Deut 12.5–14; etc.). 26: *Nakedness may not be exposed*, perhaps because undergarments were not normally worn; contrast 28.42.

**21.1–22.20: Ordinances (rulings) and statutes (rules).** In form and content, this section resembles other ancient Near Eastern legal collections. It comprises four sections: two groups of rulings (*ordinances*, v. 1), beginning with *when* or *if*, on specific cases (21.1–11; 21.18–22.17), and stringent rules (*statutes*) beginning with *whoever* or *you* (21.12–17; 22.18–20).

**21.2–11: Manumission regulations** (cf. Deut 15.12–18; Lev 25.39–55) for indentured Israelite (lit., “Hebrew,” v. 2; see 1.15n.) servants; they provide procedures rather than penalties. Laws dealing with servitude usually come at the end of ancient Near Eastern law collections; here they are first, indicating the humanitarian interests of the “book of the covenant” and/or its placement immediately after Israel’s liberation from slavery. **2–6:** Regulations for a manservant. **2:** *Buy*, better “acquire.” *Slave*, better “debt-servant” (also v. 7). *Six years*, term limit for debt servitude. **5–6:** The servant can irrevocably forego independence; a physical mark involving little trauma signifies his subjugation (v. 6). **6:** *Before God*, probably at a local sanctuary (also 22.9). **7–11:** A maidservant’s rights are different because her master or his son has rights to both her reproductive capacity and her labor; contrast Deut 15.12, 17.

**21.12–32: Violence regulations** include absolute rules for capital offenses (vv. 12–17) and case rulings concerning assaults by humans (18–27) and animals (28–32). **12–14:** Important distinction, appearing three other times in the Hebrew Bible (Num 35.9–29, 31–34; Deut 19.1–13; Josh 20.1–9) between deliberate and accidental homicide. **13:** *Place to . . . flee* because the victim’s kin would seek revenge. **15, 17:** Two rules supporting parental authority, probably over adult children in an extended family (also Lev 20.9). **16:** *Kidnap*, lit., “steal”; see 20.15n.

<sup>17</sup> Whoever curses father or mother shall be put to death.

<sup>18</sup> When individuals quarrel and one strikes the other with a stone or fist so that the injured party, though not dead, is confined to bed, <sup>19</sup> but recovers and walks around outside with the help of a staff, then the assailant shall be free of liability, except to pay for the loss of time, and to arrange for full recovery.

<sup>20</sup> When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished.

<sup>21</sup> But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property.

<sup>22</sup> When people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no further harm follows, the one responsible shall be fined what the woman's husband demands, paying as much as the judges determine. <sup>23</sup> If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, <sup>24</sup> eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup> burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

<sup>26</sup> When a slaveowner strikes the eye of a male or female slave, destroying it, the owner shall let the slave go, a free person, to compensate for the eye. <sup>27</sup> If the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be let go, a free person, to compensate for the tooth.

<sup>28</sup> When an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. <sup>29</sup> If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner

has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner also shall be put to death. <sup>30</sup> If a ransom is imposed on the owner, then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption of the victim's life. <sup>31</sup> If it gores a boy or a girl, the owner shall be dealt with according to this same rule. <sup>32</sup> If the ox gores a male or female slave, the owner shall pay to the slaveowner thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned.

<sup>33</sup> If someone leaves a pit open, or digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls into it, <sup>34</sup> the owner of the pit shall make restitution, giving money to its owner, but keeping the dead animal.

<sup>35</sup> If someone's ox hurts the ox of another, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the price of it; and the dead animal they shall also divide. <sup>36</sup> But if it was known that the ox was accustomed to gore in the past, and its owner has not restrained it, the owner shall restore ox for ox, but keep the dead animal.

**22** <sup>a</sup> When someone steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, the thief shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep. <sup>b</sup> The thief shall make restitution, but if unable to do so, shall be sold for the theft. <sup>4</sup> When the animal, whether ox or donkey or sheep, is found alive in the thief's possession, the thief shall pay double.

<sup>2</sup> If a thief is found breaking in, and is beaten to death, no bloodguilt is incurred;

<sup>a</sup> Ch 21.37 in Heb

<sup>b</sup> Verses 2, 3, and 4 rearranged thus: 3b, 4, 2, 3a

<sup>c</sup> Ch 22.1 in Heb

**17:** *Curses* were believed to have potency and thus were as serious as physical assault. **18–19:** Temporary injury, less serious than permanent injury, has lesser punishments. **20:** *Slave*, probably a non-Israelite (cf. vv. 21,32). **22–27:** Measure-for-measure punishment, or “lex talionis” (Lev 24.19–20; Deut 19.21) is a principle of fair treatment of assailants and not necessarily a literal prescription for retaliatory treatment in all cases. Note that compensation is sometimes acceptable (vv. 22,26,27) and that the rabbinic understanding of talion calls for paying damages **28–32:** Goring ox cases, similar to those in Mesopotamian law (see esp. Laws of Hammurabi 250–52), mandate liability for accidental or negligent homicide, though in Israelite law no benefit may accrue from the ox. **30:** *Ransom* instead of death, because the cause was negligence, not murder. **32:** A chattel *slave* (as in v. 21) rather than an indentured servant (as in vv. 2–11), because monetary value is assigned. A *shekel* weighed about .4 oz (11.4 gm).

**21.33–22.15:** **Property and restitution**, more case rulings. **21.33–36:** Compensation for death or injury to animals because of negligence. **22.1–4:** Theft of property (cf. 22.16n.). *Sold*, debt-servitude to secure funds for the fine. **2–3:** Nighttime theft is more serious, presumably because the intruder's intent is less clear.

<sup>3</sup> but if it happens after sunrise, bloodguilt is incurred.

<sup>5</sup> When someone causes a field or vineyard to be grazed over, or lets livestock loose to graze in someone else's field, restitution shall be made from the best in the owner's field or vineyard.

<sup>6</sup> When fire breaks out and catches in thorns so that the stacked grain or the standing grain or the field is consumed, the one who started the fire shall make full restitution.

<sup>7</sup> When someone delivers to a neighbor money or goods for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the neighbor's house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double. <sup>8</sup> If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall be brought before God,<sup>a</sup> to determine whether or not the owner had laid hands on the neighbor's goods.

<sup>9</sup> In any case of disputed ownership involving ox, donkey, sheep, clothing, or any other loss, of which one party says, "This is mine," the case of both parties shall come before God;<sup>a</sup> the one whom God condemns<sup>b</sup> shall pay double to the other.

<sup>10</sup> When someone delivers to another a donkey, ox, sheep, or any other animal for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or is carried off, without anyone seeing it, <sup>11</sup> an oath before the LORD shall decide between the two of them that the one has not laid hands on the property of the other; the owner shall

accept the oath, and no restitution shall be made. <sup>12</sup> But if it was stolen, restitution shall be made to its owner. <sup>13</sup> If it was mangled by beasts, let it be brought as evidence; restitution shall not be made for the mangled remains.

<sup>14</sup> When someone borrows an animal from another and it is injured or dies, the owner not being present, full restitution shall be made. <sup>15</sup> If the owner was present, there shall be no restitution; if it was hired, only the hiring fee is due.

<sup>16</sup> When a man seduces a virgin who is not engaged to be married, and lies with her, he shall give the bride-price for her and make her his wife. <sup>17</sup> But if her father refuses to give her to him, he shall pay an amount equal to the bride-price for virgins.

<sup>18</sup> You shall not permit a female sorcerer to live.

<sup>19</sup> Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.

<sup>20</sup> Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.

<sup>21</sup> You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

<sup>22</sup> You shall not abuse any widow or orphan.

<sup>23</sup> If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; <sup>24</sup> my wrath

<sup>a</sup> Or *before the judges*

<sup>b</sup> Or *the judges condemn*

5–6: Restitution for agricultural damages caused by negligence. 7–15: Restitution for loss of property in another's care. 9–11: Two cases of judicial impasse. Disputes lacking evidence or witnesses are decided, as elsewhere in the ancient Near East, using unspecified ritual mechanisms to elicit divine judgment; cf. Num 5.11–31. 9: *This is mine*, an oath tantamount to a self-curse, causing divine punishment if the person is lying.

22.16–20: **Social and religious stipulations**, including one case ruling (22.16–17) and three rules (22.18–20). 16–17: Consensual premarital sex obligates the man to marry the woman or compensate her father for the decrease, because of her lost virginity, in the *bride-price* (better "marital gift" or "bridewealth," because the payment did not mean a man was buying a wife) a future husband might pay. 16: *Seduces*, not coerces, implying her consent. 18–20: Like 21.12–17, this second group of absolute rules—prohibiting sorcery (cf. Deut 18.10–11), bestiality (cf. Lev 18.23; 20.15–16; Deut 27.21), and apostasy—are unequivocal and involve capital punishment. 20: *Devoted to destruction* (execution) elsewhere entails eradicating the offender's family and confiscating their property (Lev 27.28–29).

22.21–23.19. **Ethical and religious exhortations and norms**. The stipulations of the second part of the community regulations (see 20.22–23.33n.) are mostly unconditional. Some concern social relationships and justice (22.21–27; 23.1–12) and others involve obligations to God (22.28–31; 23.13–19), thus linking humanitarian and religious matters. 22.21–27: Concern for the disadvantaged appears repeatedly in the Pentateuch (e.g., 23.6,9–12; Lev 19.33–34; 23.22; Deut 1.16; 10.18–19; 24.17–22) but not in other ancient Near Eastern law collections. 22–24: The concept of measure for measure, or "one reaps what one sows" (cf. Judg 1. 7; Obad 15), appears in the

will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

<sup>25</sup> If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. <sup>26</sup> If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; <sup>27</sup> for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.

<sup>28</sup> You shall not revile God, or curse a leader of your people.

<sup>29</sup> You shall not delay to make offerings from the fullness of your harvest and from the outflow of your presses.<sup>a</sup>

The firstborn of your sons you shall give to me. <sup>30</sup> You shall do the same with your oxen and with your sheep: seven days it shall remain with its mother; on the eighth day you shall give it to me.

<sup>31</sup> You shall be people consecrated to me; therefore you shall not eat any meat that is mangled by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs.

**23** You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. <sup>2</sup> You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; <sup>3</sup> nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.

<sup>4</sup> When you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey going astray, you shall bring it back.

<sup>5</sup> When you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden and you

would hold back from setting it free, you must help to set it free.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>6</sup> You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. <sup>7</sup> Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. <sup>8</sup> You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.

<sup>9</sup> You shall not oppress a resident alien; you know the heart of an alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.

<sup>10</sup> For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; <sup>11</sup> but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.

<sup>12</sup> Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest, so that your ox and your donkey may have relief, and your homeborn slave and the resident alien may be refreshed. <sup>13</sup> Be attentive to all that I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.

<sup>14</sup> Three times in the year you shall hold a festival for me. <sup>15</sup> You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread; as I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt.

No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

<sup>16</sup> You shall observe the festival of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall observe the festival of ingathering at the end of the year, when

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

warning that God will punish with death those who abuse *widows* and *orphans*; the wives of such people will be widowed and their children fatherless. 28–31: Several religious matters: prohibitions (vv. 28,31) and prescriptions (vv. 29–30). 28: A human *leader*, like God, is unassailable. Cf. Lev 24.15–16; 1 Kings 21.10,13. 29–30: Appears to require child sacrifice, like animal sacrifice, or perhaps the dedication of the firstborn to service at a sanctuary; but see 13.2.n.; 34.19–20; Num 18.27; no provision for redemptions is given. 31: *Consecrated* (lit., “holy”), see 19.6n. Elsewhere, to be edible animals must be drained of their blood (Lev 7.24; 17.13–15). 23.1–12: Judicial integrity (vv. 1–3,6–8) and the protection of animals and marginal groups (vv. 4–5,6,9–12). 1–3: 20.16; Lev 19.12,15; Deut 19.15–19. 4–5: Cf. Deut 22.1–4. 6–9: See 22.21–27n. 10–11: A seventh-year agricultural hiatus to benefit the poor. 12: A seventh-day rest (see 16.23–30n.) benefits animals, servants, and foreigners; contrast 20.8–11. 13–19: Obligations to God. 13: See 15.11n, 20.3. 14–19a: The three major agricultural festivals, commemorated as pilgrimage festivals to the local shrine (cf. 34.22–23): *unleavened bread* (linked to passover and the Exodus; see 12.15n.); *harvest*, or *first fruits*, also called Shavuot or Festival of Weeks or Pentecost (34.22,26; Lev 23.15–21;

you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. <sup>17</sup> Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God.

<sup>18</sup> You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my festival remain until the morning.

<sup>19</sup> The choicest of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

<sup>20</sup> I am going to send an angel in front of you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared. <sup>21</sup> Be attentive to him and listen to his voice; do not rebel against him, for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him.

<sup>22</sup> But if you listen attentively to his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and a foe to your foes.

<sup>23</sup> When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, <sup>24</sup> you shall not bow down to their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices, but you shall utterly demolish them and break their pillars in pieces. <sup>25</sup> You shall worship the LORD your God, and I<sup>a</sup> will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from among you. <sup>26</sup> No one shall miscarry or be

barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days. <sup>27</sup> I will send my terror in front of you, and will throw into confusion all the people against whom you shall come, and I will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. <sup>28</sup> And I will send the pestilence<sup>b</sup> in front of you, which shall drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from before you. <sup>29</sup> I will not drive them out from before you in one year, or the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply against you. <sup>30</sup> Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased and possess the land. <sup>31</sup> I will set your borders from the Red Sea<sup>c</sup> to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates; for I will hand over to you the inhabitants of the land, and you shall drive them out before you. <sup>32</sup> You shall make no covenant with them and their gods. <sup>33</sup> They shall not live in your land, or they will make you sin against me; for if you worship their gods, it will surely be a snare to you.

**24** Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, and worship at a distance. <sup>2</sup> Moses alone shall

<sup>a</sup> Gk Vg: Heb *he*

<sup>b</sup> Or *hornets*: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>c</sup> Or *Sea of Reeds*

Deut 16.9–12); *ingathering*, also called Sukkot or Festival of Booths (Lev 23.33–43; Deut 16.13–15). <sup>17</sup>: *All your males*, contrast Deut 31.11–12. *Before the Lord God*, presumably wherever there is an altar (20.22–26n.); contrast Deut 16.2,6,7,11,15,16, which stipulate pilgrimage to one place. <sup>18</sup>: The blood prohibition applies to all sacrifices, not just festival ones. *Until the morning*, cf. 12.8. <sup>19a</sup>: *House*, general designation for a shrine (Gen 28.22). *The first fruits* elsewhere constitute a tax to support priests (also Deut 26.1–3; Neh 10.36–37; see 29.26–34n.) <sup>19b</sup>: *Milk*, perhaps "fat," likely prohibiting the slaughter of the kid's mother to protect her breeding potential (also 34.26b; Deut 14.21).

<sup>23.20–33</sup>: The Sinai narrative resumes with further divine promises and admonitions. <sup>20–23</sup>: The *angel* (lit., "messenger") represents God's presence (see 3.2n.; 3.19–20n.). <sup>22</sup>: *Enemy . . . foes* employs Near Eastern treaty language. <sup>23–33</sup>: Cf. 34.11–17. <sup>23,28</sup>: See 3.2n. 3.8n. <sup>24</sup>: Cf. 20.3; 23.13. *Pillars*, upright stones, considered idolatrous (34.13; Lev 26.1; Deut 12.3, etc.), but in some sources and circumstances acceptable (e.g., Gen 28.16–22). <sup>25–26</sup>: Sustenance, health, and progeny are the blessings produced by covenant fealty (Lev 26.3–10; Deut 28.1–6). <sup>27–30</sup>: The land's indigenous inhabitants will be gradually expelled; in Deuteronomy and related literature, they are to be exterminated (e.g., Deut 7.2; Josh 10–11). <sup>31</sup>: One of several traditions about the extent of the land (e.g., Gen 15.18; Num 34.1–12). *Red Sea*, see 13.18n. *The sea of the Philistines*, the Mediterranean. <sup>32–33</sup>: *Their gods*, see 15.11n.

<sup>24.1–18</sup>: **Theophanies and covenant ceremonies.** Repetitive or conflicting details again (see 19.1–25n.) indicate a composite narrative about God's appearance—to Moses and the leaders (vv. 1–2,9–11), and to Moses alone (vv. 12–18). Covenant ratification rituals are known from ancient Near Eastern documents. <sup>1–2</sup>: Several zones of sanctity are implied; see 19.20–25n. <sup>1</sup>: *Nadab* and *Abihu*, Aaron's two eldest sons; see 6.23n.



come near the LORD; but the others shall not come near, and the people shall not come up with him.”

<sup>3</sup> Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice, and said, “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” <sup>4</sup> And Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. He rose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and set up twelve pillars, corresponding to the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> He sent young men of the people of Israel, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed oxen as offerings of well-being to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he dashed against the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” <sup>8</sup> Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, “See the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. Under his feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for

clearness. <sup>11</sup> God<sup>a</sup> did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; also they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

<sup>12</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, and wait there; and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and the commandment, which I have written for their instruction.” <sup>13</sup> So Moses set out with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. <sup>14</sup> To the elders he had said, “Wait here for us, until we come to you again; for Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has a dispute may go to them.”

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. <sup>16</sup> The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the cloud. <sup>17</sup> Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. <sup>18</sup> Moses entered the cloud, and went up on the mountain. Moses was on the mountain for forty days and forty nights.

**25** The LORD said to Moses: <sup>2</sup> Tell the Israelites to take for me an offering; from all whose hearts prompt them to

<sup>a</sup> Heb *He*

3–8: Covenant ceremony. 3: *Words*, referring to the Decalogue (see 20.1–17n.), and *ordinances*, referring to the community rulings (see 20.22–23.33n.). *One voice*, unanimous agreement; cf. 19.8. 4: *Moses wrote*, see 24.12n. *Pillars*, see 23.24n. 5: *Burnt offerings . . . offerings of well-being* (cf. 18.12), the former burned entirely, with the rising smoke constituting God’s portion (Lev 1); the latter provided a ceremonial feast for the participants (v. 11; cf. Deut 27.6–7). Celebratory repasts bind those sharing the meal (here, God and the people); see 18.12n. 6–8: Another ratification ritual, again involving the reading and ratification of the covenant, draws on the life-death quality of blood (see 22.31n.); throwing half on the people and half on the altar (for God, as 20.24) links them. 7: *Book of the covenant*, see 20.22–23.33n. 8: *On the people*, perhaps on the pillars (v. 4) representing them. *Made*, lit., “cut,” denotes covenant making (also 34.10,12,15 and elsewhere, e.g., Gen 26.28; Judg 2.2). 9–11: Part-way up the mountain (continuing from vv. 1–2), the leaders too have a ceremonial meal and, despite the danger (see 3.6n.), have a visual experience of God. 10: *Saw . . . God . . . feet* suggests anthropomorphism; elsewhere, seeing God directly is too dangerous (see 3.2n.,6n.; 33.11n.,23n.). *Sapphire*, better “lapis lazuli”; cf. Ezek 1.26. 12–18: The theophany to Moses alone in the holiest zone combines two sources: the E narrative of vv.12–14 will resume in the golden calf episode of 31.18–34.35, and the P narrative of vv. 25–18 continues in the next chapter 12: *Tablets*, probably two (31.18; 32.15); important documents were recorded in duplicate. *I have written*, i.e., God writes the document (also 31.18; 32.16; 34.1; Deut 9.10); contrast 24.4; 34.27–28. 13–14: *Joshua* and *Hur* appear for the second time (17.9n.; 17.10n.). 15–17: *Cloud and fire*, see 3.2n. and 19.16–19n. *Glory of the LORD*, see 16.7n. 15: *Covered*, see 40.34n. 16: *Settled*, better “dwelled,” uses the same Heb root as the noun for God’s wilderness dwelling, the tabernacle, introduced in the following chapter; see 25.9n.

**Chs 25–40: Sanctuary and new covenant.** The focus of the rest of Exodus is the construction of the wilderness tabernacle as an earthly home for God. Detailed directions for building the portable shrine (25.1–27.21; 30.1–31.18) and for clothing and inaugurating its priests (28.1–29.46) are followed by an account of its construc-

give you shall receive the offering for me.

<sup>3</sup>This is the offering that you shall receive from them: gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>4</sup>blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine linen, goats' hair, <sup>5</sup>tanned rams' skins, fine leather,<sup>a</sup> acacia wood, <sup>6</sup>oil for the lamps, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>7</sup>onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and for the breastpiece. <sup>8</sup>And have them make me a sanctuary, so that I may dwell among them. <sup>9</sup>In accordance with all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

<sup>10</sup>They shall make an ark of acacia wood; it shall be two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high.

<sup>11</sup>You shall overlay it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall overlay it, and you shall make a molding of gold upon it all around. <sup>12</sup>You shall cast four rings of gold for it and put them on its four feet, two rings on the one side of it, and two rings on the other side. <sup>13</sup>You shall make poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. <sup>14</sup>And you shall put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, by which to carry the ark. <sup>15</sup>The poles shall remain in the rings of the ark; they shall not be taken from it. <sup>16</sup>You shall put into the ark the covenant<sup>b</sup> that I shall give you.

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

tion so God's presence can enter (35.1–40.38). Much of the information in the second section is the same as in the first, although the internal order differs. Between the two sections comes the golden calf episode (chs 32–34), in which the covenant is broken and restored.

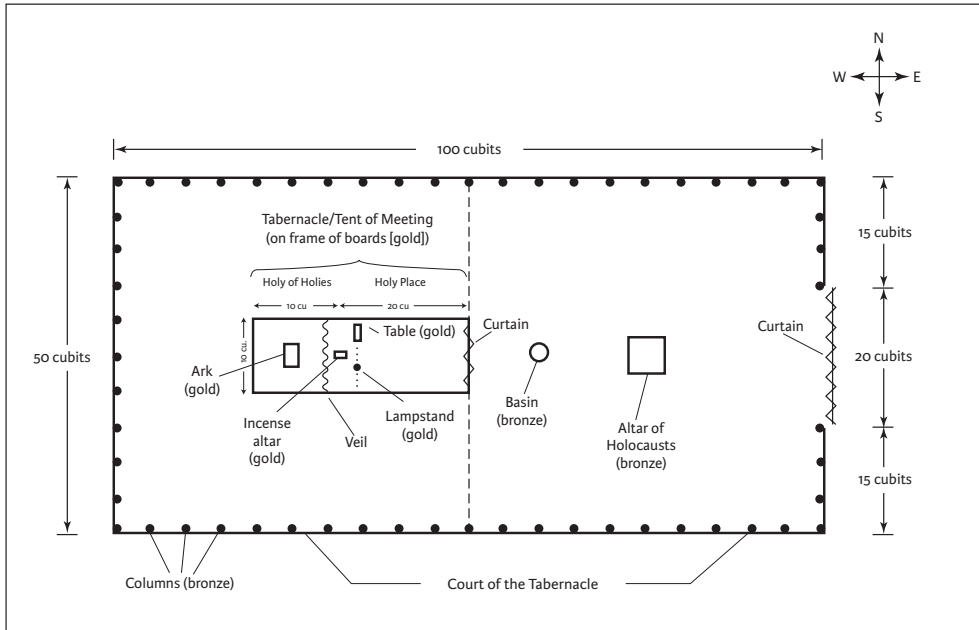
**25.1–31.18: Instructions for building the tabernacle and inaugurating the priesthood.** Unlike religious edifices today, which are places that people enter to worship, temples and shrines in the ancient world were considered earthly residences for deities (see 25.8) and were off-limits for most humans. They were costly, well-furnished structures, befitting their divine occupants. A modest tent-shrine, perhaps reflected in the term “tent of meeting” (see 27.21n.), may have existed in early Israel; but the elaborate and costly Exodus tabernacle is likely a virtual structure, based somewhat on knowledge of the later Jerusalem Temple. Like Mount Sinai (and the Jerusalem Temple), the portable wilderness shrine has three zones of sanctity; see 19.20–25n. Following an introduction (25.1–9) and instructions for making the sacred furnishings (25.10–40) are directions for making the structure (ch 26) and its courtyard and altar (27.1–19). Directives for lamp oil (27.20–21) precede a concluding section (28.1–31.18) that includes instructions for the vestments (ch 28), the consecration (ch 29) of the priests, and the making of other furnishings and of incense (ch 30) and ends with God's announcing the two chief artisans and mandating sabbath observance (ch 31).

**25.1–9: Introduction: the materials** (also 35.4–29). Seven kinds of substances (metals, yarn, skins, wood, oil, spices, and gemstones) signify the totality of supplies. **2: Offering . . . hearts**, indicating that materials will come from donations, not taxes. **3:** Three precious metals will be used according to the three zones of sanctity (see 19.20–25n.), with *gold* for the most holy and *bronze* for the least holy. **5: Acacia**, an insect-resistant hardwood found in arid regions. **8: Sanctuary**, see 15.17n. *Dwell among them*, indicating that the shrine will be God's earthly residence (see 25.1–31.17n.). The Heb term for *dwell* denotes a moveable presence rather than one tied to a fixed location. **9: Pattern** designates the heavenly abode that is model for the earthly one (see 3.8n.). *Tabernacle*, a noun formed from the Heb verb “to dwell” (see v. 8n.). Used fifty-eight times in Exodus, here it refers to the entire sacred complex. It can also denote just the tent structure (e.g., 26.1).

**25.10–40: Interior furnishings.** Described first, the most holy item, the gold-covered ark (vv. 10–22), will be situated in the inner sanctum. Three more gold items—table (vv. 23–30), lampstand (vv. 31–40), and incense altar (not prescribed in this section; see 30.1–10)—will be near the ark, in the main room of the shrine.

**25.10–22: The ark and its cover** (also 37.1–9). A gilded chest that will contain the sacred covenant document, the ark has a lid surmounted by winged creatures over which God's invisible presence rests. In ancient Israel's aniconic tradition, the ark comes to become a material symbol of God (see 1 Sam 4.4; 2 Sam 6.2; cf. Ex 25.31–40n.). **10:** It is similar in size (ca. 45 × 27 × 27 in = 114 × 69 × 69 cm) to ancient Egyptian chests for keeping valuables. **12–15: Rings and poles** for transport are known from ancient Egypt and Syria. **16:** The Heb word for *covenant* here (“*edut*”; cf. 2.24n.; 20.22–23.33n.) is favored by the Priestly writer; perhaps referring to the tablets of 24.12, it is similar to the word for “meet,” thus signifying the role of the ark as a place for oracular





Chs 25–31; 36–39: The structure of the Tabernacle as described in the book of Exodus

<sup>17</sup> Then you shall make a mercy seat<sup>a</sup> of pure gold; two cubits and a half shall be its length, and a cubit and a half its width. <sup>18</sup> You shall make two cherubim of gold; you shall make them of hammered work, at the two ends of the mercy seat.<sup>b</sup> <sup>19</sup> Make one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other; of one piece with the mercy seat<sup>b</sup> you shall make the cherubim at its two ends. <sup>20</sup> The cherubim shall spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat<sup>b</sup> with their wings. They shall face one to another; the faces of the cherubim shall be turned toward the mercy seat.<sup>b</sup> <sup>21</sup> You shall put the mercy seat<sup>b</sup> on the top of the ark; and in the ark you shall put the covenant<sup>c</sup> that I shall give you. <sup>22</sup> There

I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat,<sup>b</sup> from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the covenant,<sup>c</sup> I will deliver to you all my commands for the Israelites.

<sup>23</sup> You shall make a table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>24</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, and make a molding of gold around it. <sup>25</sup> You shall make around it a rim a handbreadth wide, and a molding of gold around the rim. <sup>26</sup> You shall make for it four

<sup>a</sup> Or a cover  
<sup>b</sup> Or the cover  
<sup>c</sup> Or treaty, or testimony; Heb *eduth*

revelations (v. 22; 29.42–43; 33.7–10) and alluding to another name (“tent of meeting”; see 27.20n.; 27.21n.; 38.8n.) for the wilderness shrine. 17–22: The ark’s cover (*mercy seat*) features composite beings (*cherubim*) whose wings form the throne, with the ark as its footstool, on which God’s invisible presence rests (1 Sam 4.4; 1 Chr 28.2; Pss 99.1,5; 132.7); see 16.34n. Similar figures as components of thrones are known from ancient Near Eastern art. 22: *Meet*, see v. 16n.

25.23–30: The table (also 37.10–16; cf. 1 Kings 7.48) is the repository for sacred vessels and for the bread offering. A dwelling place for a deity, as for humans, needs a table for food. Meat, bread, and liquids are the comestibles set before God, though the priests, not God, consume the bread (Lev 24.5–9). 23: The table’s dimensions (36 × 18 in = 1 × .5 m; height: 27 in = .75 m) are similar to those of offering tables depicted in ancient Near

rings of gold, and fasten the rings to the four corners at its four legs.<sup>27</sup> The rings that hold the poles used for carrying the table shall be close to the rim.<sup>28</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold, and the table shall be carried with these.<sup>29</sup> You shall make its plates and dishes for incense, and its flagons and bowls with which to pour drink offerings; you shall make them of pure gold.<sup>30</sup> And you shall set the bread of the Presence on the table before me always.

<sup>31</sup> You shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals shall be of one piece with it;<sup>32</sup> and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it;<sup>33</sup> three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand.<sup>34</sup> On the lampstand itself there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its calyxes and petals.<sup>35</sup> There shall be a calyx of one piece with it under the first pair of branches, a calyx of one piece with it under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one piece with it under the last pair of branches—so for the six branches that go out of the lampstand.<sup>36</sup> Their calyxes and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one hammered piece of pure gold.<sup>37</sup> You shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set

up so as to give light on the space in front of it.<sup>38</sup> Its snuffers and trays shall be of pure gold.<sup>39</sup> It, and all these utensils, shall be made from a talent of pure gold.<sup>40</sup> And see that you make them according to the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain.

**26** Moreover you shall make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns; you shall make them with cherubim skillfully worked into them.<sup>2</sup> The length of each curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains shall be of the same size.<sup>3</sup> Five curtains shall be joined to one another; and the other five curtains shall be joined to one another.<sup>4</sup> You shall make loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain in the first set; and likewise you shall make loops on the edge of the outermost curtain in the second set.<sup>5</sup> You shall make fifty loops on the one curtain, and you shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is in the second set; the loops shall be opposite one another.<sup>6</sup> You shall make fifty clasps of gold, and join the curtains to one another with the clasps, so that the tabernacle may be one whole.

<sup>7</sup> You shall also make curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; you shall make eleven curtains.<sup>8</sup> The length of each curtain shall be thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains shall be of the same size.<sup>9</sup> You shall join five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves, and the sixth curtain you shall double over at the front of the tent.<sup>10</sup> You

Eastern art. **27–28:** Its *rings* and *poles* provide portability; see 25.12–15n. **29:** *Incense*, see 30.7n., 22–38n., 34–38. **30:** *Bread of the Presence* (“bread [set] before [God]”) refers to loaves offered to God on the sabbath.

**25.31–40:** The *lampstand* (Heb “menorah”; also 37.17–24) will hold oil lamps for illuminating God’s dwelling (cf. the ten lampstands of the Jerusalem Temple, 1 Kings 7.49). No dimensions are provided. The wealth of botanical terms (branches, calyxes, almond blossoms, petals) suggests that in shape and decoration, it represented a sacred tree and perhaps even God as source of fertility (see 3.2n.). **31:** *Base* and *shaft* together denote a cylindrical stand flared at the bottom. **37:** Seven lamps, perhaps one on each branch; otherwise, a single lamp in the middle (see 27.20n.; Lev 24.2). **39:** A *talent*, or 3,000 shekels, is about 34 kg = 75.5 lb. **40:** *Pattern*, see 25.9n. The divine blueprint must be followed exactly so that God dwells among the people.

**26.1–37:** The *tabernacle structure* (also 36.8–38). The tent itself consists of coverings (vv. 1–14), frames (vv. 15–30), and textile partitions (vv. 31–37) that form two interior spaces: the most holy place for the ark, and the holy place where the furnishings will be placed. **1–14:** *Coverings*. The tentlike structure will be formed with two fabric layers—panels of linen and tricolored wools decorated with *cherubim* (see 25.17–22n.), and unadorned goat-hair panels—covered with two layers of animal skins (v. 14). **1:** *Tabernacle*, referring to the tent itself; see 25.9n. *Linen* renders an Egyptian term for a luxury fabric. *Blue*, *purple*, and *crimson* were the most costly and

shall make fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in one set, and fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that is outermost in the second set.

<sup>11</sup>You shall make fifty clasps of bronze, and put the clasps into the loops, and join the tent together, so that it may be one whole. <sup>12</sup>The part that remains of the curtains of the tent, the half curtain that remains, shall hang over the back of the tabernacle. <sup>13</sup>The cubit on the one side, and the cubit on the other side, of what remains in the length of the curtains of the tent, shall hang over the sides of the tabernacle, on this side and that side, to cover it. <sup>14</sup>You shall make for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and an outer covering of fine leather.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>15</sup>You shall make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. <sup>16</sup>Ten cubits shall be the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the width of each frame. <sup>17</sup>There shall be two pegs in each frame to fit the frames together; you shall make these for all the frames of the tabernacle. <sup>18</sup>You shall make the frames for the tabernacle: twenty frames for the south side; <sup>19</sup>and you shall make forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under the first frame for its two pegs, and two bases under the next frame for its two pegs; <sup>20</sup>and for the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side twenty frames, <sup>21</sup>and their forty bases of silver, two bases under the first frame, and two bases under the next frame; <sup>22</sup>and for the rear of the tabernacle westward you shall make six frames. <sup>23</sup>You shall make two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear; <sup>24</sup>they shall be separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring; it shall be the same with both of them; they shall form the two corners. <sup>25</sup>And so there shall be eight frames, with their bases of silver, sixteen bases; two bases under the first frame, and two bases under the next frame.

<sup>26</sup>You shall make bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, <sup>27</sup>and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the side of the tabernacle at the rear westward. <sup>28</sup>The middle bar, halfway up the frames, shall pass through from end to end. <sup>29</sup>You shall overlay the frames with gold, and shall make their rings of gold to hold the bars; and you shall overlay the bars with gold. <sup>30</sup>Then you shall erect the tabernacle according to the plan for it that you were shown on the mountain.

<sup>31</sup>You shall make a curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen; it shall be made with cherubim skillfully worked into it. <sup>32</sup>You shall hang it on four pillars of acacia overlaid with gold, which have hooks of gold and rest on four bases of silver. <sup>33</sup>You shall hang the curtain under the clasps, and bring the ark of the covenant<sup>b</sup> in there, within the curtain; and the curtain shall separate for you the holy place from the most holy. <sup>34</sup>You shall put the mercy seat<sup>c</sup> on the ark of the covenant<sup>b</sup> in the most holy place. <sup>35</sup>You shall set the table outside the curtain, and the lampstand on the south side of the tabernacle opposite the table; and you shall put the table on the north side.

<sup>36</sup>You shall make a screen for the entrance of the tent, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework. <sup>37</sup>You shall make for the screen five pillars of acacia, and overlay them with gold; their hooks shall be of gold, and you shall cast five bases of bronze for them.

**27** You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and it shall be

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>c</sup> Or *the cover*

highly prized dyes. 15–30: **Frames.** A complex system of wooden boards and bars, with metal fastenings and bases, will form frames for the hangings. The information is incomplete, and the size and manner of assembly remain conjectural. But the tent is clearly rectangular (ca. 45 x 15 ft = 13.8 x 4.6 m). 31–37: **Partitions.** A textile curtain with *cherubim* decorations (see 25.17–22n.) will subdivide the interior space into two zones of holiness (v. 33), and a textile panel will form the entrance; both will be made of linen and tricolored wool (see 26.1–14n.). 33: *Most holy [place]*, or inner sanctuary (see 1 Kings 6.16).

27.1–19: **The courtyard and its altar** (also 38.1–20). Directions for making the courtyard altar (27.1–8), on which animals will be burnt (29.13,18) and animal blood will be splashed (29.12,16), precede instructions for making the enclosure wall (ca. 7.5 ft = 2.3 m high), which forms a courtyard (27.9–19) measuring ca. 150 x 75 ft = 45.7 x 22.9 m. 1–8: **Altar.** The only courtyard object in this passage (see 30.17–21 for the courtyard basin) is

three cubits high. <sup>2</sup>You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. <sup>3</sup>You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. <sup>4</sup>You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze; and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. <sup>5</sup>You shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net shall extend halfway down the altar. <sup>6</sup>You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze; <sup>7</sup>the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. <sup>8</sup>You shall make it hollow, with boards. They shall be made just as you were shown on the mountain.

<sup>9</sup>You shall make the court of the tabernacle. On the south side the court shall have hangings of fine twisted linen one hundred cubits long for that side; <sup>10</sup>its twenty pillars and their twenty bases shall be of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver. <sup>11</sup>Likewise for its length on the north side there shall be hangings one hundred cubits long, their pillars twenty and their bases twenty, of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands shall be of silver. <sup>12</sup>For the width of the court on the west side there shall be fifty cubits of hangings, with ten pillars and ten bases. <sup>13</sup>The width of

the court on the front to the east shall be fifty cubits. <sup>14</sup>There shall be fifteen cubits of hangings on the one side, with three pillars and three bases. <sup>15</sup>There shall be fifteen cubits of hangings on the other side, with three pillars and three bases. <sup>16</sup>For the gate of the court there shall be a screen twenty cubits long, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; it shall have four pillars and with them four bases. <sup>17</sup>All the pillars around the court shall be banded with silver; their hooks shall be of silver, and their bases of bronze. <sup>18</sup>The length of the court shall be one hundred cubits, the width fifty, and the height five cubits, with hangings of fine twisted linen and bases of bronze. <sup>19</sup>All the utensils of the tabernacle for every use, and all its pegs and all the pegs of the court, shall be of bronze.

<sup>20</sup>You shall further command the Israelites to bring you pure oil of beaten olives for the light, so that a lamp may be set up to burn regularly. <sup>21</sup>In the tent of meeting, outside the curtain that is before the covenant,<sup>a</sup> Aaron and his sons shall tend it from evening to morning before the LORD. It shall be a perpetual ordinance to be observed throughout their generations by the Israelites.

**28** Then bring near to you your brother Aaron, and his sons with him, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests—

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

the large (ca. 7.5 × 7.5 × 4.5 ft = 2.3 × 2.3 × 1.4 m) and elaborate but portable altar; contrast the earthen altar of 20.24–26. **2:** *Horns*, quarter-round pieces, on the corners (as for the incense altar, 30.2), are attested in many excavated examples; they are used in the ritual of 29.12. **9–19: Enclosure.** As the least sacred zone, the courtyard will have unadorned textiles and metal fittings and utensils mainly of bronze; the linen panel for the entrance, however, will be decorated with tricolored wool (see 26.1n.). The location of the tent within the court is unspecified.

**27.20–21: Lamp oil** (also 35.8,28). **20:** A single *lamp* belongs to the tradition that uses “tent of meeting” for the wilderness shrine; see v. 21n. (cf. 25.37n.). *Regularly* means perpetually: light symbolizing divine presence will always be there. **21: Tent of meeting**, designating the place where Israelites or their representatives meet God, refers to the tent-shrine thirty-four times in Exodus (see 25.16n.); it may reflect a tradition that is separate from and older than texts using “tabernacle” (see 25.9n; see also 39.32n.). *Covenant*, perhaps elliptical for “ark [or tablets] of the covenant.” *Aaron* appears for the first time in the tabernacle texts, anticipating the following unit.

**28.1–43: Vestments for the priests** (also 39.1–31). Included in the instructions for the tabernacle, the vestments are not simply priests’ clothing; some are sacred furnishings and even ritual objects. After an introduction (vv. 1–5), the focus is on Aaron’s apparel (vv. 6–39) and not that of his sons, who were second-tier priests (vv. 40–43). **1–5: Introduction.** The priestly lineage is announced, followed by a summary of the six prescribed vestments to be made of linen and tricolored wool. **1:** See the genealogy of 6.16–25, especially v. 23. *Aaron* has

Aaron and Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.<sup>2</sup> You shall make sacred vestments for the glorious adornment of your brother Aaron.<sup>3</sup> And you shall speak to all who have ability, whom I have endowed with skill, that they make Aaron's vestments to consecrate him for my priesthood.<sup>4</sup> These are the vestments that they shall make: a breast-piece, an ephod, a robe, a checkered tunic, a turban, and a sash. When they make these sacred vestments for your brother Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests,<sup>5</sup> they shall use gold, blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen.

<sup>6</sup> They shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen, skillfully worked.<sup>7</sup> It shall have two shoulder-pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together.<sup>8</sup> The decorated band on it shall be of the same workmanship and materials, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen.<sup>9</sup> You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel,<sup>10</sup> six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth.<sup>11</sup> As a gem-cutter engraves signets, so you shall engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel; you shall mount them in settings of gold filigree.<sup>12</sup> You shall set the two stones on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel; and Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders

for remembrance.<sup>13</sup> You shall make settings of gold filigree,<sup>14</sup> and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings.

<sup>15</sup> You shall make a breastpiece of judgment, in skilled work; you shall make it in the style of the ephod; of gold, of blue and purple and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen you shall make it.<sup>16</sup> It shall be square and doubled, a span in length and a span in width.<sup>17</sup> You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian,<sup>a</sup> chrysolite, and emerald shall be the first row;<sup>18</sup> and the second row a turquoise, a sapphire,<sup>b</sup> and a moonstone;<sup>19</sup> and the third row a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst;<sup>20</sup> and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they shall be set in gold filigree.<sup>21</sup> There shall be twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes.<sup>22</sup> You shall make for the breastpiece chains of pure gold, twisted like cords;<sup>23</sup> and you shall make for the breastpiece two rings of gold, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece.<sup>24</sup> You shall put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece;<sup>25</sup> the two ends of the two cords you shall attach to the two settings, and so attach it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod.<sup>26</sup> You shall make two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breast-

<sup>a</sup> The identity of several of these stones is uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *lapis lazuli*

appeared frequently but is first called *priest* here. No title is given for him in the Pentateuch; the titles "high priest" (as Hag 1.12; Zech 3.1) and "chief priest" (2 Kings 25.18) are in non-Torah texts. **2:** *Sacred*, better "holy," because they are worn in and correspond to the shrine's holy space. **3:** *All . . . ability*, including women; see 35.4–29n. **5:** Sumptuous fabrics, corresponding to those of the shrine's holy space; see 26.1n. **6–39:** **Aaron's garments.** The first two—ephod (vv. 6–14) and breastpiece (vv. 15–30), and the turban (vv.36–38), have ritual functions; the others—robe (vv. 31–35), turban (vv. 36–38), tunic (v. 39), and sash (v. 39)—are opulent garments like those clothing royalty and statues of the gods in the ancient Near East. **6–14:** The somewhat enigmatic *ephod* (contrast other biblical uses, e.g., Judg 8.27; 1 Sam 2.18; 14.3) is a ceremonial garment like a bib or apron, adorned with engraved stones (vv. 9–12) representing and commemorating (*remembrance*, v. 12; see 13.9n.) the Israelite tribes. Wearing this garment and the breastpiece (next note), Aaron embodies all Israel; oracles he will receive (v. 30) are thus for all Israelites. **15–30:** Just as enigmatic in design is the *breastpiece of judgment*. Like the *ephod* to which it is attached, it has gemstones (twelve of them) representing (vv. 17–21) and commemorating (*remembrance*, v. 29; see 13.9n.) the Israelite tribes. Also, it has a pouch for the *Urim* and *Thummim* (v. 30). They are specially marked pebbles or rocks cast or thrown to secure divine decisions, a form of divination (cf. Num 27.21; 1 Sam 14.41) like casting lots, often used to decide difficult matters (e.g., Josh 18.6,8; Prov 16.33). Set close to its wearer's heart, the site of intellect and wisdom, the breastpiece was to be used in seeking divine

piece, on its inside edge next to the ephod.  
<sup>27</sup>You shall make two rings of gold, and attach them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its joining above the decorated band of the ephod. <sup>28</sup>The breastpiece shall be bound by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it may lie on the decorated band of the ephod, and so that the breastpiece shall not come loose from the ephod. <sup>29</sup>So Aaron shall bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breast-piece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the holy place, for a continual remembrance before the LORD. <sup>30</sup>In the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart when he goes in before the LORD; thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the Israelites on his heart before the LORD continually.

<sup>31</sup>You shall make the robe of the ephod all of blue. <sup>32</sup>It shall have an opening for the head in the middle of it, with a woven binding around the opening, like the opening in a coat of mail,<sup>a</sup> so that it may not be torn. <sup>33</sup>On its lower hem you shall make pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, all around the lower hem, with bells of gold between them all around—<sup>34</sup>a golden bell and a pomegranate alternating all around the lower hem of the robe. <sup>35</sup>Aaron shall wear it when he ministers, and its sound shall be heard when he goes into the holy place before the LORD, and when he comes out, so that he may not die.

<sup>36</sup>You shall make a rosette of pure gold, and engrave on it, like the engraving of a

signet, "Holy to the LORD."<sup>37</sup> You shall fasten it on the turban with a blue cord; it shall be on the front of the turban. <sup>38</sup>It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and Aaron shall take on himself any guilt incurred in the holy offering that the Israelites consecrate as their sacred donations; it shall always be on his forehead, in order that they may find favor before the LORD.

<sup>39</sup>You shall make the checkered tunic of fine linen, and you shall make a turban of fine linen, and you shall make a sash embroidered with needlework.

<sup>40</sup>For Aaron's sons you shall make tunics and sashes and headdresses; you shall make them for their glorious adornment. <sup>41</sup>You shall put them on your brother Aaron, and on his sons with him, and shall anoint them and ordain them and consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. <sup>42</sup>You shall make for them linen undergarments to cover their naked flesh; they shall reach from the hips to the thighs; <sup>43</sup>Aaron and his sons shall wear them when they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister in the holy place; or they will bring guilt on themselves and die. This shall be a perpetual ordinance for him and for his descendants after him.

**29** Now this is what you shall do to them to consecrate them, so that they may serve me as priests. Take one young bull and two rams without blemish,<sup>2</sup> and unleavened

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

judgment on legal matters. **31–35:** The *robe* is adorned at its hem with tricolored woolen *pomegranates*, like the tassels appearing on the clothing of deities and royalty in ancient Near Eastern iconography. The *golden bells* at the hem bring the auditory sense into the shrine; their jingling was perhaps apotropaic as the priest approached the dangerous, most holy zone (v. 35; see 3.6n.; 19.13n.; 30.7n.). **36–38:** The headpiece was to be a *turban* (also v. 39) notable for its golden *rosette* (and also a crown; see *diadem*, 29.6). The rosette's engraved words were perhaps part of a ritual protecting the priest as he approached the perfect (and dangerous) purity of God's presence; see preceding note. *Favor* (or "acceptance"; cf. Jer 14.10) is the opposite of any *guilt* (better "sin") that Israelites may commit in their sacrifices. **39:** An embroidered *sash* and a *checkered* (more likely, "fringed") *tunic* complete the vestments for Aaron. **40–43:** **Vestments for other priests**, less elaborate and costly than those for Aaron. **42:** *Undergarments*, perhaps "trousers"; see 20.26n. **43:** *Perpetual . . . descendants*, that is, the hereditary priestly lineage.

**29.1–46: Consecration of the priests.** Priestly authority derives from installation rites as well as from symbolic garments. The rites are described (vv. 1–37), followed by instructions for a regular sacrifice (vv. 38–43) and a final summation (vv. 44–46). **1–37: Installation procedures** (enacted in Lev 8), which will last seven days and are performed by Moses acting as priest, comprise three rites and the sacrifice of three animals for expiatory and purificatory purposes. **1–9: Three rites:** washing, dressing, anointing. **1: Consecrate** (to make holy) appears



bread, unleavened cakes mixed with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil. You shall make them of choice wheat flour.<sup>3</sup> You shall put them in one basket and bring them in the basket, and bring the bull and the two rams.<sup>4</sup> You shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and wash them with water.<sup>5</sup> Then you shall take the vestments, and put on Aaron the tunic and the robe of the ephod, and the ephod, and the breastpiece, and gird him with the decorated band of the ephod;<sup>6</sup> and you shall set the turban on his head, and put the holy diadem on the turban.<sup>7</sup> You shall take the anointing oil, and pour it on his head and anoint him.<sup>8</sup> Then you shall bring his sons, and put tunics on them,<sup>9</sup> and you shall gird them with sashes<sup>a</sup> and tie headdresses on them; and the priesthood shall be theirs by a perpetual ordinance. You shall then ordain Aaron and his sons.

<sup>10</sup> You shall bring the bull in front of the tent of meeting. Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the bull,<sup>11</sup> and you shall slaughter the bull before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting,<sup>12</sup> and shall take some of the blood of the bull and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and all the rest of the blood you shall pour out at the base of the altar.<sup>13</sup> You shall take all the fat that covers the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and turn them into smoke on the altar.<sup>14</sup> But the flesh of the bull, and its skin, and its dung, you shall burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin offering.

<sup>15</sup> Then you shall take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on

the head of the ram,<sup>16</sup> and you shall slaughter the ram, and shall take its blood and dash it against all sides of the altar.<sup>17</sup> Then you shall cut the ram into its parts, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its parts and its head,<sup>18</sup> and turn the whole ram into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> You shall take the other ram; and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on the head of the ram,<sup>20</sup> and you shall slaughter the ram, and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the lobes of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet, and dash the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar.<sup>21</sup> Then you shall take some of the blood that is on the altar, and some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it on Aaron and his vestments and on his sons and his sons' vestments with him; then he and his vestments shall be holy, as well as his sons and his sons' vestments.

<sup>22</sup> You shall also take the fat of the ram, the fat tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the appendage of the liver, the two kidneys with the fat that is on them, and the right thigh (for it is a ram of ordination),<sup>23</sup> and one loaf of bread, one cake of bread made with oil, and one wafer, out of the basket of unleavened bread that is before the LORD;<sup>24</sup> and you shall place all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD.<sup>25</sup> Then you shall take them from their hands, and turn them into smoke on the altar on top of

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *sashes, Aaron and his sons*

seven times in this chapter. **4:** *Wash*, see 19.10n. **7:** *Anointing* Aaron (but not his sons; contrast 28.41; 30.30) is a symbolic procedure marking transition to a new status (as for royalty, 1 Sam 9.16); here it affords priests the requisite holiness for entering the tabernacle's holy space. **5:** *Vestments*, see notes to ch 28. **9:** *Ordain*, lit., "fill the hand," an idiom alluding to the scepter or staff often held by an officer; it thus signifies the rights and duties of a position. **10–37:** *Animal sacrifices*. The first two—bull of purification (vv. 10–14; see Lev 4.1–12) and ram for burnt offering (vv. 15–18; see Lev 1)—prepare the priests; the third and most elaborate is the ram for their ordination (vv. 19–34; see the well-being offering, Lev 3). **12:** *Horns*, see 27.2n. The altar itself must be purified. **14:** The *sin offering* effects the moral purification necessary for approaching God's total purity. Some scholars consider this an offering that removes ritual impurity from sections of the tabernacle. **18:** *Burnt offering*, see 24.5n. *Pleasing odor*, see Gen 8.21. **20:** Sprinkling the ram's blood on the priests' extremities (*lobes . . . thumbs . . . toes*), which represent their entire bodies, substitutes animal blood and death for that of the priests; their symbolic death means they belong to God. **22:** *Ordination*, see v. 9n. **24:** *Elevation offering*, lifted to God.



the burnt offering of pleasing odor before the LORD; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

<sup>26</sup> You shall take the breast of the ram of Aaron's ordination and raise it as an elevation offering before the LORD; and it shall be your portion. <sup>27</sup> You shall consecrate the breast that was raised as an elevation offering and the thigh that was raised as an elevation offering from the ram of ordination, from that which belonged to Aaron and his sons.

<sup>28</sup> These things shall be a perpetual ordinance for Aaron and his sons from the Israelites, for this is an offering; and it shall be an offering by the Israelites from their sacrifice of offerings of well-being, their offering to the LORD.

<sup>29</sup> The sacred vestments of Aaron shall be passed on to his sons after him; they shall be anointed in them and ordained in them.

<sup>30</sup> The son who is priest in his place shall wear them seven days, when he comes into the tent of meeting to minister in the holy place.

<sup>31</sup> You shall take the ram of ordination, and boil its flesh in a holy place; <sup>32</sup> and Aaron and his sons shall eat the flesh of the ram and the bread that is in the basket, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>33</sup> They themselves shall eat the food by which atonement is made, to ordain and consecrate them, but no one else shall eat of them, because they are holy. <sup>34</sup> If any of the flesh for the ordination, or of the bread, remains until the morning, then you shall burn the remainder with fire; it shall not be eaten, because it is holy.

<sup>35</sup> Thus you shall do to Aaron and to his sons, just as I have commanded you; through seven days you shall ordain them. <sup>36</sup> Also every day you shall offer a bull as a sin offering for atonement. Also you shall offer a sin offering for the altar, when you make atonement for it, and shall anoint it, to consecrate it. <sup>37</sup> Seven days you shall make atonement for

the altar, and consecrate it, and the altar shall be most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become holy.

<sup>38</sup> Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old regularly each day.

<sup>39</sup> One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening; <sup>40</sup> and with the first lamb one-tenth of a measure of choice flour mixed with one-fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and one-fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. <sup>41</sup> And the other lamb you shall offer in the evening, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD. <sup>42</sup> It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. <sup>43</sup> I will meet with the Israelites there, and it shall be sanctified by my glory; <sup>44</sup> I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar; Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate, to serve me as priests. <sup>45</sup> I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God. <sup>46</sup> And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them; I am the LORD their God.

**30** You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. <sup>2</sup> It shall be one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it shall be square, and shall be two cubits high; its horns shall be of one piece with it. <sup>3</sup> You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, and its sides all around and its horns; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. <sup>4</sup> And you shall make two golden rings for it; under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall hold the poles with which to carry it. <sup>5</sup> You shall make the poles of acacia wood,

26–34: Without lands or agricultural holdings, priests depended on a portion of the sacrifice for their maintenance (Lev 7.31–36; 22.1–16; see 23.19n.); the meat and accompanying bread are eaten in sacred space, affirming their special relationship with God (see 24.5n.). 35–37: During the seven-day installation ceremonies, the altar too must be purified and sanctified (also v. 12). 38–42: Regular sacrifices. A *daily burnt offering* (see 24.5n.) of animals with grain, oil, and wine is prescribed (see Num 28.3–8). 40: *Hin*, a liquid measure (4 qts = 3.8 L). 42–43: *Meet*, see 25.16n. 44–46: *Summation*, using covenant language (see 6.7n.; 19.4n.; 20.2n.). 45–46: *Dwell*, see 25.8n.

30.1–31.18. **Additional instructions.** The instructions conclude with information about four more components (incense altar, basin, oil, incense) of the shrine and about a census, the artisans, and the sabbath. 30.1–10: **Incense altar** (also 37.25–28). Smaller (ca. 18 × 18 × 36 in = 5 × .5 × 1.0 m) than the horned courtyard

and overlay them with gold. <sup>6</sup> You shall place it in front of the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant,<sup>a</sup> in front of the mercy seat<sup>b</sup> that is over the covenant,<sup>a</sup> where I will meet with you. <sup>7</sup> Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, <sup>8</sup> and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the LORD throughout your generations. <sup>9</sup> You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. <sup>10</sup> Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is most holy to the LORD.

<sup>11</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>12</sup> When you take a census of the Israelites to register them, at registration all of them shall give a ransom for their lives to the LORD, so that no plague may come upon them for being registered. <sup>13</sup> This is what each one who is registered shall give: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary (the shekel is twenty gerahs), half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. <sup>14</sup> Each one who is registered, from twenty years old and upward, shall give the LORD's offering. <sup>15</sup> The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you bring this offering to the LORD to make atonement for your lives. <sup>16</sup> You shall take the atonement money from the Israelites and shall designate it for the service of the tent of meeting; before the LORD it will be a reminder to the Israelites of the ransom given for your lives.

<sup>17</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>18</sup> You shall make a bronze basin with a bronze stand for washing. You shall put it between the tent of meeting and the altar, and you shall put water in it; <sup>19</sup> with the water<sup>c</sup> Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and their feet. <sup>20</sup> When they go into the tent of meeting, or when they come near the altar to minister, to make an offering by fire to the LORD, they shall wash with water, so that they may not die. <sup>21</sup> They shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they may not die: it shall be a perpetual ordinance for them, for him and for his descendants throughout their generations.

<sup>22</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>23</sup> Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred fifty, and two hundred fifty of aromatic cane, <sup>24</sup> and five hundred of cassia—measured by the sanctuary shekel—and a hin of olive oil; <sup>25</sup> and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. <sup>26</sup> With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the covenant,<sup>a</sup> <sup>27</sup> and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, <sup>28</sup> and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand; <sup>29</sup> you shall consecrate them, so that they may be most holy; whatever touches them will become

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>b</sup> Or *the cover*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *it*

altar (see 27.2n.), it is the third golden object to be placed in front of the inner sanctum (see 25.10–40n.). **7: Fragrant incense** (vv. 34–38) involves the olfactory senses. **9:** Food is not offered on this altar. **10:** See Lev 16.29–34; cf. Num 16.46. *Sin offering*, see 29.14n. **11–16: Census.** People are counted for taxes or for conscription (Num 1). Ancient peoples believed that counting people could bring disaster (as 2 Sam 24), and the payment here is to prevent misfortune. **13: Shekel**, a weight (ca. 4 oz = 11.4 gm), not a coin. The half-shekel (“beka”) of the census is mentioned in the metal inventory (38.26). *Shekel of the sanctuary* may allude to a priestly role in maintaining standard weights. **16: Reminder**, see 13.9n. **17–21: Basin** (also 38.8; 40.7,30). Made of bronze, the least holy metal, the washstand will be placed in the least sacred zone, the courtyard. Washing is part of the process of purification before approaching the perfect purity of God’s presence (see 19.10n.). **22–38: Oil and incense** (also 37.29) are to be made of costly aromatic substances: *myrrh*, *cinnamon*, *aromatic cane*, and *cassia*, along with *olive oil*, for the oil (vv. 22–25); and several kinds of resin (*stacte*, *galbanum*, *frankincense*), a variety of cinnamon (*onycha*), and *salt* for the incense (v. 34). Anointing will change the status of the shrine, its furnishings, and its personnel from profane to holy; see 29.7n. **24: Hin**, see

holy.<sup>30</sup> You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, in order that they may serve me as priests.<sup>31</sup> You shall say to the Israelites, “This shall be my holy anointing oil throughout your generations.<sup>32</sup> It shall not be used in any ordinary anointing of the body, and you shall make no other like it in composition; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you.<sup>33</sup> Whoever compounds any like it or whoever puts any of it on an unqualified person shall be cut off from the people.”

<sup>34</sup>The LORD said to Moses: Take sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum, sweet spices with pure frankincense (an equal part of each),<sup>35</sup> and make an incense blended as by the perfumer, seasoned with salt, pure and holy;<sup>36</sup> and you shall beat some of it into powder, and put part of it before the covenant<sup>3</sup> in the tent of meeting where I shall meet with you; it shall be for you most holy.<sup>37</sup> When you make incense according to this composition, you shall not make it for yourselves; it shall be regarded by you as holy to the LORD.<sup>38</sup> Whoever makes any like it to use as perfume shall be cut off from the people.

**31** The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>2</sup> See, I have called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah: <sup>3</sup> and I have filled him with divine spirit,<sup>b</sup> with ability, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. <sup>6</sup> Moreover, I have appointed with him Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you: <sup>7</sup> the tent of meeting, and the ark of the

covenant,<sup>3</sup> and the mercy seat<sup>c</sup> that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, <sup>8</sup> the table and its utensils, and the pure lampstand with all its utensils, and the altar of incense, <sup>9</sup> and the altar of burnt offering with all its utensils, and the basin with its stand, <sup>10</sup> and the finely worked vestments, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests, <sup>11</sup> and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense for the holy place. They shall do just as I have commanded you.

<sup>12</sup>The LORD said to Moses: <sup>13</sup> You yourself are to speak to the Israelites: “You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, given in order that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. <sup>14</sup> You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; everyone who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it shall be cut off from among the people. <sup>15</sup> Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. <sup>16</sup> Therefore the Israelites shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. <sup>17</sup> It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”

<sup>18</sup>When God<sup>d</sup> finished speaking with Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the covenant,<sup>a</sup> tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>b</sup> Or *with the spirit of God*

<sup>c</sup> Or *the cover*

<sup>d</sup> Heb *he*

29.40n. 36: *Tent of meeting* . . . *meet*, see 27.21n. 31.1–11: *Artisans* (also 35.30–36.7). Two chief artisans are designated, one from the southernmost tribe (Judah) and one from the northernmost (Dan). 2: *Bezalel*, see 1 Chr 2.18–20. *Hur*, see 17.10n. 3: *Divine spirit*, see v. 11n. *Ability* (or “wisdom, skill”), *intelligence*, and *knowledge* constitute artistic genius (cf. 1 Kings 7.14). 6: *Oholiab* is otherwise unknown. 11: *Do . . . commanded* implies that human creativity is subordinated to divine inspiration. 12–17: *Sabbath* (also 35.2–3), see 16.23–30n. The sabbath injunction adds the theme of sacred time to the sacred space set forth in the preceding chapters. 12: The command for the seventh-day observance is introduced by a phrase—*The LORD said/spoke to Moses*—used here for the seventh time in this section (25.1; 30.11,17,22,34; 31.1,12). 17: In Priestly tradition, as circumcision signifies the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17), so the sabbath is the *sign* of the covenant with Israel. 18: This verse concludes the tabernacle instructions and resumes the narrative of the Sinai theophany (24.18). *Two tablets . . . written*, see 24.12n.

**32** When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”<sup>2</sup> Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”<sup>3</sup> So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron.<sup>4</sup> He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold,<sup>a</sup> and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!”<sup>5</sup> When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.”<sup>6</sup> They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup>they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said,

‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’ ”<sup>9</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are.<sup>10</sup> Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup>But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup>Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people.<sup>13</sup> Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’ ”<sup>14</sup> And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

<sup>a</sup> Or *fashioned it with a graving tool*; Meaning of Heb uncertain

**32.1–34.35: Covenant violation and restoration.** The golden-calf apostasy (also Deut 9.7–21; Ps 106.19–23; Neh 9.16–21) interrupts the tabernacle sequence, yet parallels it in some ways: a command to construct, contributions of gold, construction, an altar and sacrifices. It thus contrasts the proper response to God in the chapters following this section, with the sinful one it describes. The people’s sins arouse divine wrath; Moses too is angry but intercedes several times (ch 32). After Moses seeks God’s presence and pleads again for his people (ch 33), God reestablishes the covenant (ch 34). **32.1–35: Sin, divine anger, and several intercessions by Moses.** This episode shares many details with the account of Jeroboam (first king of the northern kingdom, 928–907 BCE) erecting golden calves in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12.28–33; see also Deut 9.7–10.11). **1:** *Delayed*, for forty days and nights (24.18). *Make gods*, that is, provide visible evidence of divine presence. *Man who brought*, that is, Moses; not acknowledging that God had actually rescued them, they seek a replacement for Moses, whose prolonged absence creates anxiety. **2–3:** *Gold rings* (earrings); cf. 3.22; Gen 35.4; Judg 8.24. **4:** *A calf* (better “young bull”), like cherubim, could form the pedestal for the deity to stand on when descending to earth; or it may have been an object of worship, representing bovine strength and fertility associated with the LORD. *Gods*, a plural form (also vv. 1,8,23,31) like 1 Kings 12.28; contrast Neh 9.18 and Ps 106.19–20, which refer to a single deity. **5:** *Festival to the LORD*, indicating that the calves are not images of another deity. **6:** *Burnt offerings . . . well-being*, see 24.5n. *Eat . . . drink*, typical components of sacrificial events, which were occasions for community enjoyment as well as ritual activity. *Revel* (perhaps “dance”), another component of festal events. **7:** *Your people*, not “my people” (3.7; 5.1; etc.). *You*, that is, Moses (also 33.1; cf. 20.2; 32.11–12, where God secures Israel’s freedom). **8:** *Cast . . . image*, of metal: see 34.17n. **10–12:** *Wrath . . . burn hot . . . consume*, invokes the language of conflagration to express the intense and utter destructiveness of punitive plagues (Num 11.33; 16.35,46; 25.4,8–9,11). **11:** Moses’s first plea for the people. *Mighty hand*, see 3.19n. **13:** Moses reminds God that the ancestral covenant (see 2.24n.)

<sup>15</sup> Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain, carrying the two tablets of the covenant<sup>a</sup> in his hands, tablets that were written on both sides, written on the front and on the back. <sup>16</sup> The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved upon the tablets. <sup>17</sup> When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, “There is a noise of war in the camp.” <sup>18</sup> But he said,

“It is not the sound made by victors,  
or the sound made by losers;  
it is the sound of revelers that I hear.”

<sup>19</sup> As soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses’ anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets from his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. <sup>20</sup> He took the calf that they had made, burned it with fire, ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it.

<sup>21</sup> Moses said to Aaron, “What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?” <sup>22</sup> And Aaron said, “Do not let the anger of my lord burn hot; you know the people, that they are bent on evil. <sup>23</sup> They said to me, ‘Make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.’ <sup>24</sup> So I said to them, ‘Whoever has gold, take it off’; so they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

<sup>25</sup> When Moses saw that the people were running wild (for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of their enemies), <sup>26</sup> then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Who is on the LORD’s side? Come to me!”

And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. <sup>27</sup> He said to them, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side, each of you! Go back and forth from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill your brother, your friend, and your neighbor.’” <sup>28</sup> The sons of Levi did as Moses commanded, and about three thousand of the people fell on that day. <sup>29</sup> Moses said, “Today you have ordained yourselves<sup>b</sup> for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of a son or a brother, and so have brought a blessing on yourselves this day.”

<sup>30</sup> On the next day Moses said to the people, “You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.” <sup>31</sup> So Moses returned to the LORD and said, “Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. <sup>32</sup> But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written.” <sup>33</sup> But the LORD said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. <sup>34</sup> But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; see, my angel shall go in front of you. Nevertheless, when the day comes for punishment, I will punish them for their sin.”

<sup>35</sup> Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf—the one that Aaron made.

**33** The LORD said to Moses, “Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham,

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>b</sup> Gk Vg Compare Tg; Heb *Today ordain yourselves*

is unconditional and irrevocable (Gen 13.15–16; etc.). 15–16: *Tablets . . . written*, see 24.12n. 17: *Joshua* is partway up the mountain (24.9–14). 19: The Heb term for *dancing* denotes circle dancing, usually done by women (as 15.20). 20: *Burned . . . ground* is idiomatic language for complete demolition (cf. 2 Kings 23.15). Moses subjects the people to a trial by ordeal (cf. Num 5.16–28). Those who suffer ill effects from coerced drinking are considered guilty and are punished (v. 35). 21–24: Aaron, however, remains unpunished (cf. Num 12), perhaps because the priesthood in later times was traced to him. 24: By saying he *threw the gold* into the fire, Aaron claims he did not intend to make a calf, contra v. 4. 26–29: The shocking violence of the Levites, perhaps reflecting an ancient power struggle, earns them eternal priesthood. 30: *Perhaps*, suggesting that divine forgiveness cannot be assumed. 31–32: Moses’s second plea for the people. 32–33: *Book*, cf. Ps 69.28; Dan 12.1; Mal 3.16. 33: God asserts individual rather than communal responsibility. 34: *The people*, not “my people”; see v. 7n. *Angel*, see 3.2n.; 23.23. 35: *The plague* is punitive (see 7.8–10.29n.; 32.10–12n.).

33.1–23. The divine presence is secured through a third plea by Moses. 1: *You*, see 32.7n. *The people*, see



Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.”<sup>2</sup> I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.<sup>3</sup> Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, or I would consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”

<sup>4</sup> When the people heard these harsh words, they mourned, and no one put on ornaments.<sup>5</sup> For the LORD had said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do to you.’”<sup>6</sup> Therefore the Israelites stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

<sup>7</sup> Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.<sup>8</sup> Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise and stand, each of them, at the entrance of their tents and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent.<sup>9</sup> When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.<sup>10</sup> When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise and bow down, all of them, at the entrance of their tent.<sup>11</sup> Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then he would return to the camp; but his young assistant, Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the tent.

<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’<sup>13</sup> Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.”<sup>14</sup> He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”<sup>15</sup> And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here.<sup>16</sup> For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

<sup>17</sup> The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.”<sup>18</sup> Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.”<sup>19</sup> And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’;<sup>a</sup> and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.<sup>20</sup> But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.”<sup>21</sup> And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock;<sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by;<sup>23</sup> then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

<sup>a</sup> Heb YHWH; see note at 3.15

32.34n. 2: *Angel*, see 3.2n.; 23.23; 32.34. *Canaanites . . . Hivites*, see 3.8n. 3: *Flowing . . . honey*, see 3.8n. *Among*, see 17.6n.; the divine presence can be punitive as well as beneficial. *Consume*, see 32.10–12n. 7: *Tent of meeting* refers to a simple tent shrine, with oracular functions, mentioned in Exodus along with the more elaborate Priestly tabernacle structure. This indicates that Exodus combines several traditions about a community shrine; see 25.16n.; 27.20n., 21n.; 39.32n. *Sought the LORD*, elliptical for seeking an oracular pronouncement from God, here procured by Moses, not priests; see 28.6–14n., 15–30n. 9–10: *Pillar of cloud*, divine presence; see 3.2n. 11: *Face to face*, an expression of intimacy available only to Moses (see Num 12.7–8; Deut 34.10–12) rather than an indication that he literally sees God’s face (see vv. 20, 23n). 13: *Your people* is covenant terminology (see 6.7n.); Moses reminds God of this relationship (contrast 32.7; 33.1). 14: *My presence will go*, better, “I personally will go.” 17: God knows Moses’s *name*, and Moses will know God’s (v. 19; see 3.15n), an expression of reciprocal intimacy 18: *Glory*, God’s royal splendor or appearance, rather than the Priestly idea of fire in a cloud; see 3.2n.; 16.7n. 19: *I will be gracious . . . mercy*, see 34.6. 20: *Face*, see 3.2n.; 3.6n.; 24.10n.; 33.11n., 23n. 23: *Back* (like arm, hand, and face) refers to God in anthropomorphic terms; see also 31.18; cf. 3.6n.



**34** The LORD said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. <sup>2</sup>Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup>No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain.” <sup>4</sup>So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. <sup>5</sup>The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, “The LORD.”<sup>a</sup> <sup>6</sup>The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed,

“The LORD, the LORD,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love and  
faithfulness,  
<sup>7</sup>keeping steadfast love for the thousandth  
generation,<sup>b</sup>  
forgiving iniquity and transgression and  
sin,  
yet by no means clearing the guilty,  
but visiting the iniquity of the parents  
upon the children  
and the children’s children,  
to the third and the fourth generation.”

<sup>8</sup>And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. <sup>9</sup>He said, “If now

I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

<sup>10</sup>He said: I hereby make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform marvels, such as have not been performed in all the earth or in any nation; and all the people among whom you live shall see the work of the LORD; for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

<sup>11</sup>Observe what I command you today. See, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>12</sup>Take care not to make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you are going, or it will become a snare among you. <sup>13</sup>You shall tear down their altars, break their pillars, and cut down their sacred poles<sup>c</sup> <sup>14</sup>(for you shall worship no other god, because the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God). <sup>15</sup>You shall not make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to their gods, someone among them will invite you, and you will eat of the sacrifice. <sup>16</sup>And you will take wives from among their daughters for your sons, and their daughters who prostitute themselves to their gods will

<sup>a</sup> Heb *YHWH*; see note at 3:15

<sup>b</sup> Or *for thousands*

<sup>c</sup> Heb *Asherim*

**34.1–35: Covenant restoration and Moses’s fourth plea to God.** 1: Moses is to *cut* (lit., “carve”) the *tablets* (see 24.12n.; contrast 32.16, where God makes them); *write*, see 24.12n. *Words*, referring to the ten words (sayings, matters) of the Decalogue, v. 28; see 18.26n.; 20.1–17n. 3: As a holy zone, access to the mountain is restricted; cf. 19.13n., 20–25n. 5: *Cloud*, see 3.2n. *Name*, see 33.17n. 6–7: This catalogue of divine qualities, part of which is known in Jewish tradition as the Thirteen Attributes of God, appears fully or in part repeatedly in the Bible, sometimes omitting transgenerational punishment (20.5–6; Num 14.18–19; Deut 7.9–10; etc.). *Generation*, see 20.5n. 9: *Inheritance*, or “possession”; see 15.17n. 11–26: These stipulations concerning religious obligations and festivals include features of the Decalogue (especially 20.3,4,8–11) and of the community regulations (especially 23.14–19). Because its primary focus is on worship, it is often considered an alternative Decalogue, part of the J source, called the Ritual Decalogue; however, it could also be a redactional supplement. 10: *Make* a covenant (also vv. 12,15), see 24.8n. 11: *Drive*, see 23.27–30n. *Amorites . . . Jebusites*, see 3.8n. 13: *Altars* and *pillars* (see 23.24n.) dedicated to gods of other peoples are forbidden, as are *sacred poles*, probably symbols of Asherah, a Canaanite goddess associated with the LORD in several ancient inscriptions. See also Deut 7.5; 12.3. 14: See 20.3n.; 20.5n. 15–16: See Num 25.1–15 for an example of such conduct. *Prostitute*, sexual metaphors sometimes characterize human-deity relationships, both positively and negatively (e.g., Isa 62.4–5; Jer 2.2; Ezek 16; 23; Hos 1–3). 16: Intermarriage with local peoples—but not with

make your sons also prostitute themselves to their gods.

<sup>17</sup>You shall not make cast idols.

<sup>18</sup>You shall keep the festival of unleavened bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib; for in the month of Abib you came out from Egypt.

<sup>19</sup>All that first opens the womb is mine, all your male<sup>a</sup> livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. <sup>20</sup>The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem.

No one shall appear before me empty-handed.

<sup>21</sup>Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even in plowing time and in harvest time you shall rest.

<sup>22</sup>You shall observe the festival of weeks, the first fruits of wheat harvest, and the festival of ingathering at the turn of the year.

<sup>23</sup>Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. <sup>24</sup>For I will cast out nations before you, and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year.

<sup>25</sup>You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with leaven, and the sacrifice of the festival of the passover shall not be left until the morning.

<sup>26</sup>The best of the first fruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God.

You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk.

<sup>27</sup>The LORD said to Moses: Write these words; in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel. <sup>28</sup>He was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the ten commandments.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>29</sup>Moses came down from Mount Sinai. As he came down from the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant<sup>c</sup> in his hand, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. <sup>30</sup>When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face was shining, and they were afraid to come near him.

<sup>31</sup>But Moses called to them; and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses spoke with them.

<sup>32</sup>Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he gave them in commandment all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. <sup>33</sup>When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face; <sup>34</sup>but whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would take the veil off, until he came out; and when he came out, and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup>the Israelites would see the face of Moses, that the skin of his face was shining; and Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

<sup>a</sup> Gk Theodotion Vg Tg: Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *words*

<sup>c</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

all other peoples—is prohibited only for men (Gen 24.3; Ezra 9.2; etc.; but cf. Deut 7.3; Josh 23.12–13; etc.). **17:** *Cast* (Heb “massekah”), made of metal rather than the sculpted image (see 20.4n.) of the Decalogue, an apparent rebuke for the golden calf incident. **18–26:** For the three festivals, see 23.14–19a n.; for unleavened bread, see 12.5n.; for the sabbath (v. 21), see 16.23–30n.; for the kid-cooking regulation, see 23.19bn.; for the firstborn redemption, see 13.2n.,13n. **27:** Moses is to *write*; see 24.12n. For *words*, see 34.1n.; for *tablets*, see 24.12n. **28:** *Forty . . . nights*, like the first time, 24.18. *Ten commandments*, better “ten words” or “ten matters” (see 18.26n.; 20.1–17n.), refers here to the ritual regulations in vv.11–26, although listing ten discrete regulations is difficult. **29–35:** Moses’s special status, as mediator between the people and God, is manifest in his radiating countenance, akin to divine luminosity (Ps 104.2; Ezek 1.27–28; Hab 3.4) too intense to be routinely visible (see 3.2n.; 3.6n.). **29,35:** *Shone* and *shining*, better “radiant.” The verb used here (from the Heb root “qrn”) means “to radiate.” The related noun “qeren,” usually meaning “horn,” has produced the erroneous notion that Moses had horns.

**35** Moses assembled all the congregation of the Israelites and said to them: These are the things that the LORD has commanded you to do:

<sup>2</sup>Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day you shall have a holy sabbath of solemn rest to the LORD; whoever does any work on it shall be put to death. <sup>3</sup>You shall kindle no fire in all your dwellings on the sabbath day.

<sup>4</sup>Moses said to all the congregation of the Israelites: This is the thing that the LORD has commanded: <sup>5</sup>Take from among you an offering to the LORD; let whoever is of a generous heart bring the LORD's offering: gold, silver, and bronze; <sup>6</sup>blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine linen; goats' hair, <sup>7</sup>tanned rams' skins, and fine leather;<sup>a</sup> acacia wood, <sup>8</sup>oil for the light, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, <sup>9</sup>and onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece.

<sup>10</sup>All who are skillful among you shall come and make all that the LORD has commanded: the tabernacle, <sup>11</sup>its tent and its covering, its clasps and its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; <sup>12</sup>the ark with its poles, the mercy seat,<sup>b</sup> and the curtain for the screen; <sup>13</sup>the table with its poles and all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; <sup>14</sup>the lampstand also for the light, with its utensils and its lamps, and the oil for the light; <sup>15</sup>and the altar of incense, with its poles, and the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance, the entrance of the tabernacle; <sup>16</sup>the altar of burnt offering, with its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils, the basin with its stand; <sup>17</sup>the

hangings of the court, its pillars and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court; <sup>18</sup>the pegs of the tabernacle and the pegs of the court, and their cords; <sup>19</sup>the finely worked vestments for ministering in the holy place, the holy vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons, for their service as priests.

<sup>20</sup>Then all the congregation of the Israelites withdrew from the presence of Moses.

<sup>21</sup>And they came, everyone whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and brought the LORD's offering to be used for the tent of meeting, and for all its service, and for the sacred vestments. <sup>22</sup>So they came, both men and women; all who were of a willing heart brought brooches and earrings and signet rings and pendants, all sorts of gold objects, everyone bringing an offering of gold to the LORD. <sup>23</sup>And everyone who possessed blue or purple or crimson yarn or fine linen or goats' hair or tanned rams' skins or fine leather,<sup>a</sup> brought them.

<sup>24</sup>Everyone who could make an offering of silver or bronze brought it as the LORD's offering; and everyone who possessed acacia wood of any use in the work, brought it. <sup>25</sup>All the skillful women spun with their hands, and brought what they had spun in blue and purple and crimson yarns and fine linen; <sup>26</sup>all the women whose hearts moved them to use their skill spun the goats' hair. <sup>27</sup>And the leaders brought onyx stones and gems to be set in the ephod and the breastpiece, <sup>28</sup>and spices and oil for the light, and for the

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *the cover*

**Chs 35–40: The tabernacle is constructed, and God's presence enters it.** The tabernacle narrative (which began with the instructions of chs 25–31) resumes: performing preliminary procedures (35.2–36.7); making tabernacle components (36.8–39.43); erecting the tabernacle and God's presence filling it (40.1–38). These chapters contain nearly verbatim repetitions of many passages of chs 25–31, except that they describe actions taken (rather than commanded) and are arranged according to pragmatic construction concerns rather than degree of sanctity. In the LXX version of these chapters, the actions taken are in a different order, and also some of those in the MT are omitted.

**35.1–36.7: Preliminary procedures.** 35.1–3: **Sabbath directives** conclude the instructions section (31.12–17; see 16.23–30n.) and begin the construction one, linking the two sections and making the sabbath the temporal equivalent of the spatial construction, the tabernacle. Both involve rest: the people rest on the sabbath, and the Tabernacle is the divine resting place (cf. Isa 66.1; cf. Num 10.33). 1: *Things*, see 18.26n.; 20.1–17n. 3: *Kindle no fire* suggests that cooking was the work forbidden on the sabbath; cf. 20.9n. 4–29: **Materials** (see 25.1–9), provided by both women and men (vv. 22,29; see 11.2n.) include fabrics made by female craftspersons (vv. 25–26; cf.

anointing oil, and for the fragrant incense.

<sup>29</sup> All the Israelite men and women whose hearts made them willing to bring anything for the work that the LORD had commanded by Moses to be done, brought it as a freewill offering to the LORD.

<sup>30</sup> Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; <sup>31</sup> he has filled him with divine spirit,<sup>a</sup> with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, <sup>32</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>33</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. <sup>34</sup> And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. <sup>35</sup> He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.

**36** Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the LORD has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the LORD has commanded.

<sup>2</sup> Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the LORD had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work; <sup>3</sup> and they received from Moses all the freewill offerings that the Israelites had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, <sup>4</sup> so that all the artisans who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed, <sup>5</sup> and said to Moses, “The people are bringing much more than

enough for doing the work that the LORD has commanded us to do.” <sup>6</sup> So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing; <sup>7</sup> for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work.

<sup>8</sup> All those with skill among the workers made the tabernacle with ten curtains; they were made of fine twisted linen, and blue, purple, and crimson yarns, with cherubim skillfully worked into them. <sup>9</sup> The length of each curtain was twenty-eight cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; all the curtains were of the same size.

<sup>10</sup> He joined five curtains to one another, and the other five curtains he joined to one another. <sup>11</sup> He made loops of blue on the edge of the outermost curtain of the first set; likewise he made them on the edge of the outermost curtain of the second set; <sup>12</sup> he made fifty loops on the one curtain, and he made fifty loops on the edge of the curtain that was in the second set; the loops were opposite one another. <sup>13</sup> And he made fifty clasps of gold, and joined the curtains one to the other with clasps; so the tabernacle was one whole.

<sup>14</sup> He also made curtains of goats' hair for a tent over the tabernacle; he made eleven curtains. <sup>15</sup> The length of each curtain was thirty cubits, and the width of each curtain four cubits; the eleven curtains were of the same size. <sup>16</sup> He joined five curtains by themselves, and six curtains by themselves. <sup>17</sup> He made fifty loops on the edge of the outermost curtain of the one set, and fifty loops on the edge

<sup>a</sup> Or *the spirit of God*

2 Kings 23:7). 35:30–36:7: Artisans (see 31:1–11), who have the added role of teachers (v. 34), receive materials. 5–7: The amount to be contributed is not specified but is abundant—*more than enough* (vv.5,7)—and may reflect guilt over the golden calf incident.

36:8–39:42: The tabernacle components are made: structure (36:8–38), interior furnishings (37:1–29), courtyard and its furnishings (38:1–20), inserted inventory (38:21–31), vestments (39:1–31). Then the work is completed (39:32–42).

36:8–38: Structure (see 26:1–37), consisting of fabrics (vv. 8–19) over frames (vv. 20–34) followed by the internal fabric divider and entry screen (vv. 35–38). 10: *He* here and in vv. 11–38 is third-person singular, which would imply Bezalel is constructing the tabernacle by himself. More likely, the third-person singular is used impersonally as a passive; thus this verse would read “The five curtains were joined. . . .” Compare v. 8 and 39:1, where the subject (*they*) of the tabernacle work is plural.

of the other connecting curtain. <sup>18</sup> He made fifty clasps of bronze to join the tent together so that it might be one whole. <sup>19</sup> And he made for the tent a covering of tanned rams' skins and an outer covering of fine leather.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Then he made the upright frames for the tabernacle of acacia wood. <sup>21</sup> Ten cubits was the length of a frame, and a cubit and a half the width of each frame. <sup>22</sup> Each frame had two pegs for fitting together; he did this for all the frames of the tabernacle. <sup>23</sup> The frames for the tabernacle he made in this way: twenty frames for the south side; <sup>24</sup> and he made forty bases of silver under the twenty frames, two bases under the first frame for its two pegs, and two bases under the next frame for its two pegs. <sup>25</sup> For the second side of the tabernacle, on the north side, he made twenty frames <sup>26</sup> and their forty bases of silver, two bases under the first frame and two bases under the next frame. <sup>27</sup> For the rear of the tabernacle westward he made six frames. <sup>28</sup> He made two frames for corners of the tabernacle in the rear. <sup>29</sup> They were separate beneath, but joined at the top, at the first ring; he made two of them in this way, for the two corners. <sup>30</sup> There were eight frames with their bases of silver: sixteen bases, under every frame two bases.

<sup>31</sup> He made bars of acacia wood, five for the frames of the one side of the tabernacle, <sup>32</sup> and five bars for the frames of the other side of the tabernacle, and five bars for the frames of the tabernacle at the rear westward. <sup>33</sup> He made the middle bar to pass through from end to end halfway up the frames. <sup>34</sup> And he overlaid the frames with gold, and made rings of gold for them to hold the bars, and overlaid the bars with gold.

<sup>35</sup> He made the curtain of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, with cherubim skillfully worked into it. <sup>36</sup> For it he made four pillars of acacia, and overlaid them with gold; their hooks were of gold, and he cast for them four bases of silver. <sup>37</sup> He also made a screen for the entrance to the tent,

of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and fine twisted linen, embroidered with needlework; <sup>38</sup> and its five pillars with their hooks. He overlaid their capitals and their bases with gold, but their five bases were of bronze.

**37** Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; it was two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>2</sup> He overlaid it with pure gold inside and outside, and made a molding of gold around it. <sup>3</sup> He cast for it four rings of gold for its four feet, two rings on its one side and two rings on its other side. <sup>4</sup> He made poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold, <sup>5</sup> and put the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark, to carry the ark. <sup>6</sup> He made a mercy seat<sup>b</sup> of pure gold; two cubits and a half was its length, and a cubit and a half its width. <sup>7</sup> He made two cherubim of hammered gold; at the two ends of the mercy seat<sup>c</sup> he made them, <sup>8</sup> one cherub at the one end, and one cherub at the other end; of one piece with the mercy seat<sup>c</sup> he made the cherubim at its two ends. <sup>9</sup> The cherubim spread out their wings above, overshadowing the mercy seat<sup>c</sup> with their wings. They faced one another; the faces of the cherubim were turned toward the mercy seat.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>10</sup> He also made the table of acacia wood, two cubits long, one cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. <sup>11</sup> He overlaid it with pure gold, and made a molding of gold around it. <sup>12</sup> He made around it a rim a handbreadth wide, and made a molding of gold around the rim. <sup>13</sup> He cast for it four rings of gold, and fastened the rings to the four corners at its four legs. <sup>14</sup> The rings that held the poles used for carrying the table were close to the rim. <sup>15</sup> He made the poles of acacia wood to carry the table, and overlaid them with gold. <sup>16</sup> And he made the vessels of pure gold that were to be on the table, its plates and dishes

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *a cover*

<sup>c</sup> Or *the cover*

37:1–29: Interior furnishings (see 25:10–40; 30:1–10), and anointing oil and incense (see 30:22–28). The ark for the holiest space comes first (vv. 1–9), followed by all three objects for the holy space: lampstand (vv. 17–24), table, and incense altar (vv. 25–28), which appears separately from the table and the lampstand in the instructions (see 31:1–11n.). The account of making anointing oil and incense (v. 29) is much briefer than in the instructions.



for incense, and its bowls and flagons with which to pour drink offerings.

<sup>17</sup> He also made the lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand were made of hammered work; its cups, its calyxes, and its petals were of one piece with it. <sup>18</sup> There were six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; <sup>19</sup> three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on one branch, and three cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with calyx and petals, on the other branch—so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. <sup>20</sup> On the lampstand itself there were four cups shaped like almond blossoms, each with its calyxes and petals. <sup>21</sup> There was a calyx of one piece with it under the first pair of branches, a calyx of one piece with it under the next pair of branches, and a calyx of one piece with it under the last pair of branches. <sup>22</sup> Their calyxes and their branches were of one piece with it, the whole of it one hammered piece of pure gold. <sup>23</sup> He made its seven lamps and its snuffers and its trays of pure gold. <sup>24</sup> He made it and all its utensils of a talent of pure gold.

<sup>25</sup> He made the altar of incense of acacia wood, one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it was square, and was two cubits high; its horns were of one piece with it. <sup>26</sup> He overlaid it with pure gold, its top, and its sides all around, and its horns; and he made for it a molding of gold all around, <sup>27</sup> and made two golden rings for it under its molding, on two opposite sides of it, to hold the poles with which to carry it. <sup>28</sup> And he made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with gold.

<sup>29</sup> He made the holy anointing oil also, and the pure fragrant incense, blended as by the perfumer.

**38** He made the altar of burnt offering also of acacia wood; it was five cubits long, and five cubits wide; it was square, and three cubits high. <sup>2</sup> He made horns for it on

its four corners; its horns were of one piece with it, and he overlaid it with bronze. <sup>3</sup> He made all the utensils of the altar, the pots, the shovels, the basins, the forks, and the firepans: all its utensils he made of bronze. <sup>4</sup> He made for the altar a grating, a network of bronze, under its ledge, extending halfway down. <sup>5</sup> He cast four rings on the four corners of the bronze grating to hold the poles; <sup>6</sup> he made the poles of acacia wood, and overlaid them with bronze. <sup>7</sup> And he put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar, to carry it with them; he made it hollow, with boards.

<sup>8</sup> He made the basin of bronze with its stand of bronze, from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting.

<sup>9</sup> He made the court; for the south side the hangings of the court were of fine twisted linen, one hundred cubits long; <sup>10</sup> its twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. <sup>11</sup> For the north side there were hangings one hundred cubits long; its twenty pillars and their twenty bases were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. <sup>12</sup> For the west side there were hangings fifty cubits long, with ten pillars and ten bases; the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver. <sup>13</sup> And for the front to the east, fifty cubits. <sup>14</sup> The hangings for one side of the gate were fifteen cubits, with three pillars and three bases.

<sup>15</sup> And so for the other side; on each side of the gate of the court were hangings of fifteen cubits, with three pillars and three bases.

<sup>16</sup> All the hangings around the court were of fine twisted linen. <sup>17</sup> The bases for the pillars were of bronze, but the hooks of the pillars and their bands were of silver; the overlaying of their capitals was also of silver, and all the pillars of the court were banded with silver.

<sup>18</sup> The screen for the entrance to the court was embroidered with needlework in blue, purple, and crimson yarns and fine twisted

38.1–20: Altar (see 27.1–8), basin (see 30.17–21), and courtyard (see 27.9–19). Unlike in the instructions, the altar (v. 1–7) and basin (v. 8) here appear sequentially. The basin lacks the functional details of ch 30 but adds that its bronze comes from mirrors of women (also 1 Sam 2.22), who were low-rank temple servitors. 8: The entrance to the tent of meeting (cf. 27.20n.; 27.21n.; 29.32n.; 38.8n.), the highly significant site of Moses's oracular interactions with God (33.9–10), was not off-limits to women (see Num 27.1–2).



linen. It was twenty cubits long and, along the width of it, five cubits high, corresponding to the hangings of the court.<sup>19</sup> There were four pillars; their four bases were of bronze, their hooks of silver, and the overlaying of their capitals and their bands of silver.<sup>20</sup> All the pegs for the tabernacle and for the court all around were of bronze.

<sup>21</sup>These are the records of the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the covenant,<sup>3</sup> which were drawn up at the commandment of Moses, the work of the Levites being under the direction of Ithamar son of the priest Aaron.<sup>22</sup> Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made all that the LORD commanded Moses;<sup>23</sup> and with him was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, engraver, designer, and embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen.

<sup>24</sup>All the gold that was used for the work, in all the construction of the sanctuary, the gold from the offering, was twenty-nine talents and seven hundred thirty shekels, measured by the sanctuary shekel.<sup>25</sup> The silver from those of the congregation who were counted was one hundred talents and one thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels, measured by the sanctuary shekel;<sup>26</sup> a beka a head (that is, half a shekel, measured by the sanctuary shekel), for everyone who was counted in the census, from twenty years old and upward, for six hundred three thousand, five hundred fifty men.<sup>27</sup> The

hundred talents of silver were for casting the bases of the sanctuary, and the bases of the curtain; one hundred bases for the hundred talents, a talent for a base.<sup>28</sup> Of the thousand seven hundred seventy-five shekels he made hooks for the pillars, and overlaid their capitals and made bands for them.<sup>29</sup> The bronze that was contributed was seventy talents, and two thousand four hundred shekels;<sup>30</sup> with it he made the bases for the entrance of the tent of meeting, the bronze altar and the bronze grating for it and all the utensils of the altar,<sup>31</sup> the bases all around the court, and the bases of the gate of the court, all the pegs of the tabernacle, and all the pegs around the court.

**39** Of the blue, purple, and crimson yarns they made finely worked vestments, for ministering in the holy place; they made the sacred vestments for Aaron; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>2</sup>He made the ephod of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen.<sup>3</sup> Gold leaf was hammered out and cut into threads to work into the blue, purple, and crimson yarns and into the fine twisted linen, in skilled design.<sup>4</sup> They made for the ephod shoulder-pieces, joined to it at its two edges.<sup>5</sup> The decorated band on it was of the same materials and workmanship, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

**38.21–31:** The inventory of work and metal materials, beginning with the most valuable (gold), has no parallel in the instructions except for the reference (v. 26) to the silver acquired at the census assessment and earmarked for operating, not construction, expenses. **21:** *Records*, tallies of resources, not accounts of labor. *Tabernacle of the covenant*, alluding to the tabernacle's receptacle (ark) for the covenant document (tablets). *Work of the Levites* here is collecting and accounting; they will eventually maintain and move the shrine (Num 4; 7:1–8). *Ithamar*, Aaron's youngest son (6:23; 28:1), has a major administrative role. **22–23:** *Bezalel . . . Oholiab*, see 31:1–11n. **24:** *Talent*, see 25:39n. The amount of *gold* is slightly less than Hezekiah's tribute to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:14). *Sanctuary shekel*, see 30:13n. **25–26:** For the collected *silver*, see 30:11–16. The *men* are slightly more in number (603,550) than in ch 12; see 12:37n. **27–28:** Information about the use of *silver* acquired by census (but not donated) is provided; such information is absent for gold. **30–31:** The *bronze* items are specified; but the basin made of women's mirrors (38.8) is omitted.

**39.1–31:** *Vestments* (see 28:1–43). This section includes some technical details, such as how the ephod's golden threads were made (v. 3), absent from the instructions section. And it omits some aspects of function: “breastpiece of judgment” appears three times in ch 28 (vv. 15, 29, 30; see 28:15–30n.) in reference to its oracular function but not here, nor are the Urim and Thummim used for divination (28:30) mentioned. **1:** Aaron is named only here and in v. 27, at the beginning and end of this section, whereas he appears frequently (sixteen times) in the instructions. *Moses* appears seven times (vv. 1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31), indicating his total involvement, in a formula punctuating the narrative: *as the LORD had commanded Moses*; cf. 40:16n.).

twisted linen; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>6</sup>The onyx stones were prepared, enclosed in settings of gold filigree and engraved like the engravings of a signet, according to the names of the sons of Israel. <sup>7</sup>He set them on the shoulder-pieces of the ephod, to be stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>8</sup>He made the breastpiece, in skilled work, like the work of the ephod, of gold, of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. <sup>9</sup>It was square; the breastpiece was made double, a span in length and a span in width when doubled. <sup>10</sup>They set in it four rows of stones. A row of carnelian,<sup>a</sup> chrysolite, and emerald was the first row; <sup>11</sup>and the second row, a turquoise, a sapphire,<sup>b</sup> and a moonstone; <sup>12</sup>and the third row, a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst; <sup>13</sup>and the fourth row, a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper; they were enclosed in settings of gold filigree. <sup>14</sup>There were twelve stones with names corresponding to the names of the sons of Israel; they were like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. <sup>15</sup>They made on the breastpiece chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; <sup>16</sup>and they made two settings of gold filigree and two gold rings, and put the two rings on the two edges of the breastpiece; <sup>17</sup>and they put the two cords of gold in the two rings at the edges of the breastpiece. <sup>18</sup>Two ends of the two cords they had attached to the two settings of filigree; in this way they attached it in front to the shoulder-pieces of the ephod. <sup>19</sup>Then they made two rings of gold, and put them at the two ends of the breastpiece, on its inside edge next to the ephod. <sup>20</sup>They made two rings of gold, and attached them in front to the lower part of the two shoulder-pieces of the ephod, at its joining above the decorated band of the ephod. <sup>21</sup>They bound the breastpiece by its rings to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord, so that it should lie on the decorated band of

the ephod, and that the breastpiece should not come loose from the ephod; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>22</sup>He also made the robe of the ephod woven all of blue yarn; <sup>23</sup>and the opening of the robe in the middle of it was like the opening in a coat of mail,<sup>c</sup> with a binding around the opening, so that it might not be torn. <sup>24</sup>On the lower hem of the robe they made pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and of fine twisted linen. <sup>25</sup>They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the lower hem of the robe all around, between the pomegranates; <sup>26</sup>a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate all around on the lower hem of the robe for ministering; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>27</sup>They also made the tunics, woven of fine linen, for Aaron and his sons, <sup>28</sup>and the turban of fine linen, and the headdresses of fine linen, and the linen undergarments of fine twisted linen, <sup>29</sup>and the sash of fine twisted linen, and of blue, purple, and crimson yarns, embroidered with needlework; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>30</sup>They made the rosette of the holy diadem of pure gold, and wrote on it an inscription, like the engraving of a signet, "Holy to the LORD." <sup>31</sup>They tied to it a blue cord, to fasten it on the turban above; as the LORD had commanded Moses.

<sup>32</sup>In this way all the work of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting was finished; the Israelites had done everything just as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>33</sup>Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses, the tent and all its utensils, its hooks, its frames, its bars, its pillars, and its bases; <sup>34</sup>the covering of tanned rams' skins and the covering of fine leather,<sup>c</sup> and the curtain for the screen; <sup>35</sup>the ark of

<sup>a</sup> The identification of several of these stones is uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Or *lapis lazuli*

<sup>c</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

**39.32–43: Completing and inspecting the work**, listing the components of the tabernacle in the same order as in chs 35–39 (rather than the order of chs 25–31); see chs 35–40n. **32: Work . . . finished** echoes the Priestly language of Gen 2.2, as does 40.33; the construction of the tabernacle, a microcosm of the cosmos, thus echoes creation. *Tabernacle of the tent of meeting*, used only here and in 40.2,6,29, combines the two designations of the wilderness shrine and thus its two functions: a place for God's earthly presence, and a locale for oracular in-

the covenant<sup>a</sup> with its poles and the mercy seat,<sup>b</sup> <sup>36</sup> the table with all its utensils, and the bread of the Presence; <sup>37</sup> the pure lampstand with its lamps set on it and all its utensils, and the oil for the light; <sup>38</sup> the golden altar, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense, and the screen for the entrance of the tent; <sup>39</sup> the bronze altar, and its grating of bronze, its poles, and all its utensils; the basin with its stand; <sup>40</sup> the hangings of the court, its pillars, and its bases, and the screen for the gate of the court, its cords, and its pegs; and all the utensils for the service of the tabernacle, for the tent of meeting; <sup>41</sup> the finely worked vestments for ministering in the holy place, the sacred vestments for the priest Aaron, and the vestments of his sons to serve as priests. <sup>42</sup> The Israelites had done all of the work just as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>43</sup> When Moses saw that they had done all the work just as the LORD had commanded, he blessed them.

**40** The LORD spoke to Moses: <sup>2</sup> On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting. <sup>3</sup> You shall put in it the ark of the covenant,<sup>a</sup> and you shall screen the ark with the curtain. <sup>4</sup> You shall bring in the table, and arrange its setting; and you shall bring in the lampstand, and set up its lamps. <sup>5</sup> You shall put the golden altar for incense before the ark of the covenant,<sup>a</sup> and set up the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. <sup>6</sup> You shall set the altar of burnt offering before the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, <sup>7</sup> and place the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it. <sup>8</sup> You shall set up the court all around, and hang up the screen for the gate of the court. <sup>9</sup> Then you shall take the anointing oil, and anoint the

tabernacle and all that is in it, and consecrate it and all its furniture, so that it shall become holy. <sup>10</sup> You shall also anoint the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and consecrate the altar, so that the altar shall be most holy. <sup>11</sup> You shall also anoint the basin with its stand, and consecrate it. <sup>12</sup> Then you shall bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance of the tent of meeting, and shall wash them with water, <sup>13</sup> and put on Aaron the sacred vestments, and you shall anoint him and consecrate him, so that he may serve me as priest. <sup>14</sup> You shall bring his sons also and put tunics on them, <sup>15</sup> and anoint them, as you anointed their father, that they may serve me as priests: and their anointing shall admit them to a perpetual priesthood throughout all generations to come.

<sup>16</sup> Moses did everything just as the LORD had commanded him. <sup>17</sup> In the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, the tabernacle was set up. <sup>18</sup> Moses set up the tabernacle; he laid its bases, and set up its frames, and put in its poles, and raised up its pillars; <sup>19</sup> and he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent over it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>20</sup> He took the covenant<sup>a</sup> and put it into the ark, and put the poles on the ark, and set the mercy seat<sup>b</sup> above the ark; <sup>21</sup> and he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the curtain for screening, and screened the ark of the covenant;<sup>a</sup> as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>22</sup> He put the table in the tent of meeting, on the north side of the tabernacle, outside the curtain, <sup>23</sup> and set the bread in order on it before the

<sup>a</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testimony*; Heb *eduth*

<sup>b</sup> Or *the cover*

teractions; see 25.16n.; 27.21n. 43: *Saw*, reminiscent of God seeing the completion of creation (Gen 1.31). *Blessed*, just as God offers blessings in the creation account (Gen 1.22,28; 2.3).

**40.1–38: Erection of the tabernacle, and God's presence filling it.** After the final instructions for assembling and anointing God's earthly abode (vv. 1–15; cf. 29.4–9; 30.26–30) are carried out (vv. 16–33), except for anointing and consecrating, which take place in Lev 8.10–13, God's presence enters it (vv. 34–38). Moses alone assembles and sanctifies the tabernacle's components and consecrates the priests and their vestments. 2: Setting up the tabernacle on the *first day of the first month* (of the second year after the Exodus; v. 17), that is (the spring) New Year's day, keys it to creation, to the new creation after the flood (Gen 8.13), and to the beginning of freedom (see 12.2n.). 16: *As the LORD had commanded him* appears in this introductory command and seven more times, following seven units of assembly (vv. 19,21,23,25,27,29,32), perhaps replicating the seven days of creation (see 39.2n.) but also emphasizing the importance that everything must be done exactly according to

LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>24</sup>He put the lampstand in the tent of meeting, opposite the table on the south side of the tabernacle, <sup>25</sup>and set up the lamps before the LORD; as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>26</sup>He put the golden altar in the tent of meeting before the curtain, <sup>27</sup>and offered fragrant incense on it; as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>28</sup>He also put in place the screen for the entrance of the tabernacle. <sup>29</sup>He set the altar of burnt offering at the entrance of the tabernacle of the tent of meeting, and offered on it the burnt offering and the grain offering as the LORD had commanded Moses. <sup>30</sup>He set the basin between the tent of meeting and the altar, and put water in it for washing, <sup>31</sup>with which Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet. <sup>32</sup>When they went into the tent of meeting, and when they approached the altar, they washed; as the LORD had com-

manded Moses. <sup>33</sup>He set up the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and put up the screen at the gate of the court. So Moses finished the work.

<sup>34</sup>Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>35</sup>Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. <sup>36</sup>Whenever the cloud was taken up from the tabernacle, the Israelites would set out on each stage of their journey; <sup>37</sup>but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day that it was taken up. <sup>38</sup>For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud<sup>a</sup> by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey.

<sup>a</sup> Heb *it*

divine specifications in order for God to take up residence. **33:** *Finished the work*, see 39.32n. **34–38:** *Cloud*, see 3.2n.; 13.21n. *Glory of the LORD*, see 16.7n. **34:** The cloud *covered* the shrine, just as it covered the mountain of revelation (24.15). Here it indicates divine satisfaction with the tabernacle as a residence for the divine. **38:** *House of Israel*, which designates the Israelites only here and 16.31 in Exodus, may reflect a wordplay: the Israelites are a house and the LORD now has an earthly house (cf. 2 Sam 7.11,13,16). The *cloud* and *fire* (divine presence) will guide the people as they continue their *journey* (see 12.37n.; 13.21n.; Num 9.15–23; 10.11–28).

# LEVITICUS

## NAME AND LOCATION IN CANON

Leviticus is situated at the center of the Torah (Pentateuch). It derives its English name from the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, where the book is titled “Leviticus” because its main concern is worship practices officiated by the high priest Aaron and his descendants, who belong to the tribe of Levi. Because Levites not belonging to Aaron’s line are mentioned only briefly in Leviticus (25.32–33), the early rabbinic title, “The Priests’ Instruction” (Heb *torat kohanim*), is perhaps more fitting. The book’s Hebrew name, *wayyiqra* (“And he [the LORD] summoned”), follows the custom of titling ancient literary works according to their opening word(s).

## AUTHORSHIP AND DATE

Leviticus presents itself as God’s speech to Moses (e.g., 1.1; 26.46; 27.34), and Moses has traditionally been understood to be its author. Modern scholars consider the book to be part of the larger Priestly source in the Pentateuch, which appears primarily in Genesis–Numbers and is so named because its content, theological ideas, and literary style reflect priestly perspectives. This source was penned by several different anonymous authors or groups of authors. The two main compositional strata in Leviticus are known as P (“Priestly”), which comprises most of chs 1–16; and H (“Holiness”), which includes the “Holiness Collection” (chs 17–26; so named because of its repeated exhortation to the Israelites to be holy), the addendum on vows, dedications, and tithes in ch 27, and brief interpolations in chs 1–16. These two strata are distinguishable on the basis of ideological and stylistic differences as well as narrative characteristics.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated that H was composed to supplement, revise, and complete the Priestly source’s earlier P stratum, which is responsible for the source’s overall narrative structure and plot. H agrees with P’s basic historical myth and religious ideology, and many of its innovations over against P are mediating positions between P and non-Priestly pentateuchal legislation. For example, in P the only Israelites who are holy are priests. In the Deuteronomic source, all of Israel is holy. H mediates between these positions by providing a means for lay Israelites to attain holiness by obeying the divine commandments. H also introduces ethical commandments that parallel non-Priestly pentateuchal laws but fall outside the scope of P’s ritual concerns.

Scholars have proposed various methods for dating Leviticus. One of the most promising exploits correspondences between its H portions and laws in the book of Deuteronomy. Strong evidence suggests that at least the core of Deuteronomy originated in the late seventh century BCE. Because H appears to revise this Deuteronomic core, it must postdate Deuteronomy. The P portions of Leviticus, which predate H, exhibit little or no correspondence with Deuteronomy and thus may be contemporary with or older than Deuteronomy; at the very least, they did not know Deuteronomy. Thus, Leviticus, like other books of the Torah, was composed over a long period: it preserves some preexilic traditions, but its literary form likely originated in the exilic or postexilic period. Correlations between Leviticus and the exilic book of Ezekiel also support this view.

## CONTENTS AND STRUCTURE

Though its content is primarily religious ritual and law, Leviticus is part of the larger Priestly story in the Pentateuch. This story rationalizes the deity’s creation of the world and subsequent decision to live among the Israelites rather than in heaven. This decision necessitates special measures to accommodate the deity, for he did not create the world with the intention of dwelling in it. These special measures include both special blessings for the Israelites so that they can provide for their god and an extensive set of rules to ensure that his habitation is suitable. Comprising the long, middle section of the Priestly account, Leviticus narrates a set of divine speeches that enumerate rules for Israel. Leviticus also includes two sections of narratives not dominated by divine instruction (8.1–10.20; 24.10–23); yet even these narrative sections serve as historical context and rationale for the laws embedded within them. The Priestly narrative thus explains the need for Leviticus’s laws and secures the proper pedigree for them.

Set at Mount Sinai, Leviticus begins exactly one year after the Israelites’ departure from Egypt, immediately following Moses’s construction of the tent of meeting and its indwelling by the deity at the end of the book

of Exodus (Ex 40.17–35), which serve as a prerequisite for the book. The Priestly source's plot continues in the book of Numbers from the exact moment that Leviticus ends. The date in Num 1.1 (“the first day of the second month, in the second year”) confirms that the series of divine speeches delivered in Leviticus and the other events recorded in the book ostensibly occurred over a period of one month.

Leviticus can be divided into five major sections:

1. **Sacrifice** (chs 1–7). In the Priestly source, no sacrifices are offered prior to receiving these laws, which follow P's narrative of the construction of the divinely ordained tabernacle. The sacrificial laws must precede the consecration of the priests and dedication of the tabernacle in chs 8–9 because Moses and the priests must know how to perform the sacrifices at these events. This section is subdivided into two parts: basic prescriptions for presenting sacrificial offerings (1.1–6.7); and elaborations on the preceding instructions (6.8–7.38), with particular emphasis on priestly concerns.
2. **The dedication of the tabernacle and priests and the transgression of Aaron's sons** (chs 8–10). This unit is subdivided into two sections: the seven-day consecration of the priests by Moses, including the dedication of the tabernacle (ch 8); and the inaugural service of the priests on the eighth day, culminating in the revelation of the divine glory, and the subsequent transgression and death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu (9.1–10.20).
3. **Ritual purity** (chs 11–16). This section is subdivided into two parts: the impurity laws (chs 11–15); and the day of purgations (ch 16). The impurity laws are enumerated prior to the description of the day of purgations in order to clarify the impurities cleansed in the annual ritual.
4. **The Holiness Collection** (chs 17–26). This unit (also called the Holiness Code; see 17.1–26.46n.) has six subdivisions:
  - laws governing sacrifice and meat consumption (ch 17);
  - miscellaneous ethical laws (chs 18–20);
  - priestly and sacrificial rules (chs 21–22);
  - laws governing calendrical observances (23.1–24.9; 25.1–26.2);
  - the account of the blasphemer, with related measure-for-measure laws, which interrupt the calendrical observance laws (24.10–23);
  - inducements for Israel's obedience, with summary postscript (26.3–46).
5. **Addendum concerning vows, dedications, and tithes** (ch 27).

## INTERPRETATION

Leviticus is difficult to understand and appreciate because it is highly technical and regularly assumes knowledge of its ritual system. Its sparse narrative structure is also easily obscured due to the large blocks of laws that comprise the book. In addition, its authors' approaches to the issues they treat and their assumptions about them are often far removed from modern Western views.

One attempt by the translators of the NRSV to bridge the gap between the ancient text of Leviticus and its modern readers is their substitution of gender-neutral language for many of the masculine pronouns and verbal forms in the book. While the intent motivating this effort is laudable, elimination of male-centered language has resulted in sometimes confusing alterations to the underlying Hebrew text. For example, laws expressed with third-person masculine forms (“If *his* offering is from the herd, *he* shall make it an unblemished male”) are regularly left untranslated or rendered into English with (nongendered) second-person forms (“If *the* offering is from the herd, *you* shall offer a male without blemish”). Likewise, singular verbs (“When any of you *brings* an offering”) are translated as plurals (“When any of you *bring* an offering”) or converted from active (“*he shall slaughter* the bull”) to passive voice (“the bull *shall be slaughtered*”). The foregoing examples, drawn from Lev 1.2–5, are representative of similar changes elsewhere in the book. They are problematic for two reasons. First, such changes may prevent the reader from understanding both individual verses and the larger religious program of the Priestly authors. Second, these alterations sometimes obscure the formal characteristics of biblical legislation and distinguishing features of both smaller, preexisting units assembled by P and, at times, even differences between P and H. In each case, the result can be to move the reader further from the text rather than to make it more accessible.

Particularly important for understanding Leviticus are the Priestly authors' views of the Israelite god and his orientation toward the world, viewpoints developed especially in the Priestly portions of Genesis and Exodus. As the Priestly authors describe him, Israel's deity is a majestic and absolute ruler who prefers to dwell in splendid and



uninterrupted repose. The Israelites therefore must carefully attend to his preferences and expectations and face dire consequences for failing to do so. At the same time, the Priestly authors consider fulfillment of the divine commands as not only eminently attainable but the norm in the Israelite community. Thus, unlike other biblical texts that present the Israelites as persistently rebellious, pentateuchal Priestly texts portray Israel primarily in positive terms.

The laws of Leviticus became a major source for early Jewish *halakhah* (law) and remain the basis for many modern Jewish religious practices, such as dietary rules, purity rules, and holidays. The laws of Leviticus also inform many New Testament and other early Christian texts.

Because the focus of Leviticus's narrative is the law in its divine speeches, the book is most profitably read first according to legal topic rather than from beginning to end. An initial reading might begin with a sampling of Leviticus's purity and ethical laws in chs 11–12 and 19 and rules for removal of impurity and sin, as found in chs 4 and 16. The reader could then turn to other exemplary chapters: chs 8 and 21 on the priesthood, ch 17 on slaughter and meat consumption, ch 23 on festivals, ch 25 on the sabbatical and jubilee years, and ch 26 on divine inducements for obedience. Further study may focus on a particular chapter or group of thematically related chapters, as outlined earlier. The distinctiveness of the laws in Leviticus and the theological perspectives they express can also be appreciated through comparison with topically related laws in Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Ezekiel 40–48. The authors of Leviticus created a remarkably coherent system of ritual and theology, and the different parts of the book should be read with an eye toward this larger internal logic.

*Jeffrey Stackert*

**1** The LORD summoned Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying:  
**2** Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When any of you bring an offering of livestock to the LORD, you shall bring your offering from the herd or from the flock.

**1.1–7.38: Sacrificial prescriptions.** This section comprises two parts: 1.1–6.7 and 6.8–7.38. In Priestly thought, sacrifice, a ritualized meal for the deity at times shared with its offerers, is the basic mode of interaction with God. To be accepted, sacrifices must be performed according to the divine instructions.

**1.1–6.7: Basic sacrificial instructions.** These laws address basic procedures for presenting food gift offerings (1.1–3.17) and purification and reparation offerings (4.1–6.7). These sacrifices can also be categorized according to the quality of each offering's sanctity. The grain, purification, and reparation offerings are each "most holy," a designation that reserves their edible portions for the priests (cf. 6.17; Num 18.8–10). Well-being offerings, portions of which are consumed by lay Israelites, are less holy sacrifices. Because burnt offerings are not eaten by humans, their holiness status is undesignated. The offerings in Leviticus are all based on a model of sacrifice common to the ancient Near East: they are enticements that rouse the deity's good will or mitigate potential threats. Yet the Priestly authors generally avoid acknowledging that sacrifices might benefit their offerers. They instead present sacrifices simply as requirements for God's habitation on earth that accord with the deity's preferences and expectations.

**1.1–3.17: Instructions for gift offerings of food.** The burnt offering, grain offering, and well-being offerings (thanksgiving, votive, or freewill; cf. 7.11–18) presented by Israelite laypersons are impromptu sacrifices. Each is described as "an offering by fire" (e.g., 1.9; 2.2; 3.3), better translated "a gift offering (of food)" (cf. 3.11,16). Presentation of gift offerings provides laypersons a specific means of expressing devotion to the deity and of favorably disposing God toward the offerer. As gifts, sacrifices become personal possessions of the deity. Further, God is understood to consume the sacrificial portions burned on the altar (cf. 21.6,8), though this view is partially sublimated in Priestly theology.

**1.1–1.17: The burnt offering.** The burnt offering (Heb "olah") is completely consumed in fire on the altar. Its name literally means "that which goes up" (in smoke from the altar; cf. 1.9). Three different types of animals for burnt offerings are listed (in descending order of value): a bull (vv. 3–9), a male sheep or goat (vv. 10–13), and turtledoves or pigeons (vv. 14–17). **1:** *Tent of meeting*, see Ex 26; 29.42–46; 40.34–38. The tent of meeting is situated in the middle of the Israelite wilderness camp (Num 2.2) and is the divine dwelling place; it is the Priestly author's precursor of the Jerusalem Temple. **2:** This is a general introduction to the burnt offering here and the well-being offering in ch 3. It clarifies that all animal food gift

<sup>3</sup> If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you shall offer a male without blemish; you shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, for acceptance in your behalf before the LORD. <sup>4</sup> You shall lay your hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it shall be acceptable in your behalf as atonement for you. <sup>5</sup> The bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer the blood, dashing the blood against all sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup> The burnt offering shall be flayed and cut up into its parts. <sup>7</sup> The sons of the priest Aaron shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. <sup>8</sup> Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the parts, with the head and the suet, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; <sup>9</sup> but its entrails and its legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall turn the whole into smoke on the altar as a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

<sup>10</sup> If your gift for a burnt offering is from the flock, from the sheep or goats, your offering shall be a male without blemish. <sup>11</sup> It shall be slaughtered on the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash its blood against

all sides of the altar. <sup>12</sup> It shall be cut up into its parts, with its head and its suet, and the priest shall arrange them on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; <sup>13</sup> but the entrails and the legs shall be washed with water. Then the priest shall offer the whole and turn it into smoke on the altar; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

<sup>14</sup> If your offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, you shall choose your offering from turtledoves or pigeons. <sup>15</sup> The priest shall bring it to the altar and wring off its head, and turn it into smoke on the altar; and its blood shall be drained out against the side of the altar. <sup>16</sup> He shall remove its crop with its contents<sup>a</sup> and throw it at the east side of the altar, in the place for ashes. <sup>17</sup> He shall tear it open by its wings without severing it. Then the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, on the wood that is on the fire; it is a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

**2** When anyone presents a grain offering to the LORD, the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshiper shall pour oil on

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

offerings must be from domesticated animals (cf. 17.1–16n.). Omission of birds here suggests that vv. 14–17 are a secondary addition. *You shall bring your offering*, lit., “he shall bring his offering.” Throughout this chapter, the offerer in Heb is masculine singular. 3: *Without blemish*, cf. 22.21–30; Mal 1.6–14. Burnt offerings are impromptu sacrifices of religious devotion (cf. 22.18–20). They are also regularly included in statutory religious observances (Ex 29.38–42; Num 28–29). Because of the prominence of burnt offerings in sacrificial worship, the main altar in the tabernacle courtyard is called the “altar of burnt offering” (Ex 38.1; 40.6). *The entrance of the tent of meeting* is the courtyard area between the altar of burnt offering and the tent (Ex 29.4; 30.17–21); see plan on p. 120. 4: *Lay your hand*, one hand only, to designate ownership of the animal prior to sacrifice. *And it shall be acceptable*, better, “and it will be accepted” (cf. 19.5–8). The language of acceptance in vv. 3–4 underscores the sacrifice as a gift eliciting divine favor (cf. Mal 1.6–14). *As atonement for you*, better, “as a ransom for him”; see 17.11n. 5: *The bull shall be slaughtered*, lit., “he [the offerer] shall slaughter the bull” (contrast Ezek 44.11). Dashing blood on the altar may serve to ransom the life of the offerer who kills the animal (cf. 17.4,11; see 17.11n.); it is also found in the cases of the well-being offering (3.2,8,13), the reparation offering (7.2), and the offering of firstborn animals (Num 18.17); cf. Ex 24.6. 7: *The sons of the priest Aaron*, though referring immediately to the male children of Aaron; these include all subsequent priests from Aaron's lineage (cf. v. 8). 9: *Turn the whole into smoke*, emphasizing that God enjoys the entire sacrifice and concretizing the image of the sacrifice's *pleasing odor* (cf. Gen 8.21). Though the Priestly authors view the earthly tabernacle as God's dwelling place, the imagery of smoke rising from the altar suggests that the deity is in the heavens. Burning sacrificial portions is a ritualized manner of effecting divine consumption.

**2.1–16: The grain offering.** Instructions for the grain offering, whose name literally means “gift, tribute (eliciting favor)” (Heb “*minḥah*”) interrupt the animal food gift offerings in chs 1 and 3 (cf. 1.2). Like the

it, and put frankincense on it,<sup>2</sup> and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests. After taking from it a handful of the choice flour and oil, with all its frankincense, the priest shall turn this token portion into smoke on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.<sup>3</sup> And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

<sup>4</sup>When you present a grain offering baked in the oven, it shall be of choice flour: unleavened cakes mixed with oil, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.<sup>5</sup> If your offering is grain prepared on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour mixed with oil, unleavened;<sup>6</sup> break it in pieces, and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering.<sup>7</sup> If your offering is grain prepared in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil.<sup>8</sup> You shall bring to the LORD the grain offering that is prepared in any of these ways; and when it is presented to the priest, he shall take it to the altar.<sup>9</sup> The priest shall remove from the grain offering its token portion and turn this into smoke

on the altar, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.<sup>10</sup> And what is left of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings by fire to the LORD.

<sup>11</sup>No grain offering that you bring to the LORD shall be made with leaven, for you must not turn any leaven or honey into smoke as an offering by fire to the LORD.<sup>12</sup> You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of choice products, but they shall not be offered on the altar for a pleasing odor.<sup>13</sup> You shall not omit from your grain offerings the salt of the covenant with your God; with all your offerings you shall offer salt.

<sup>14</sup>If you bring a grain offering of first fruits to the LORD, you shall bring as the grain offering of your first fruits coarse new grain from fresh ears, parched with fire.

<sup>15</sup>You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a grain offering.<sup>16</sup> And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke—some of the coarse grain and oil with all its frankincense; it is an offering by fire to the LORD.

passage on the birds in 1.14–17, these instructions are inserted secondarily in order to provide a still more affordable alternative for the burnt offering (cf. 1.1–17n.; 5.1–13). The second-person address of vv. 4–16, which accurately reflects the underlying Hebrew text, further sets these verses apart from vv. 1–3 and chs 1 and 3, all of which employ third-person language to describe the offerer (see Introduction). The grain offering is also a regular accompaniment to the burnt offering presented in statutory religious observances and on other occasions (cf. Ex 29.38–42; 40.29; Lev 9.17; Num 15.1–12; 28.4–6). Two main types of grain offerings are described: raw (vv. 1–3) and cooked (vv. 4–10). The cooked type is further subdivided according to method of preparation. While the raw variety is accompanied by oil and frankincense, only oil accompanies the cooked varieties, perhaps to make them more affordable for the poor. The required preparation may compensate for the lack of frankincense. 1: *Frankincense*, an aromatic resin from shrubs found in Arabia and East Africa. 2–3: *Token portion*, unlike the burnt offering, only a portion of the grain offering is burned. The remainder is designated as compensation for the priests (cf. Num 18.8–10). *Offering by fire*, see 1.1–3.17n. *Pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. While the frankincense is aromatic, the pleasing smell to God is not from incense, for the grain offering without frankincense produces the same effect (cf. v. 9). *Most holy part*, see 1.1–6.7n. 11: *Honey*, fruit syrup made from dates or grapes, not bees' honey (cf. 2 Chr 31.5). Leavening agents (including honey, which supports fermentation) are prohibited from grain offerings, perhaps to expedite their preparation (cf. Ex 12.39; Deut 16.3). 12: *Choice products*, first-processed products, such as oil, wine, grain, and dough (cf. Num 15.20–21; 18.12–13). Contrast the first-harvested grain offering of vv. 14–16. 13: NRSV omits the beginning of this verse: "You shall season each of your grain offerings with salt." *Salt* inhibits fermentation and thus may be a corollary to the prohibitions against leaven and honey. It is more likely, however, that salt functions as a flavor enhancer for the deity's food, as it does in Mesopotamian food offerings (cf. 1.1–3.17n.; 1.9n.; Job 6:6). *Salt of the covenant*, the term *covenant* (Heb "berit") here refers to a statutory requirement, not to a bilateral agreement between God and Israel (cf. Ex 31:16; contrast Lev 24.8–9, Num 18.19, and Num 25.13, where "*covenant*" refers to a due or allotment). The text is better translated, "You shall not omit from your grain offering the salt required by your God." 14–16: The first ripe offering may be a form of the offering in 23.10–11.

**3** If the offering is a sacrifice of well-being, if you offer an animal of the herd, whether male or female, you shall offer one without blemish before the LORD. <sup>2</sup>You shall lay your hand on the head of the offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the tent of meeting; and Aaron's sons the priests shall dash the blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>3</sup>You shall offer from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>4</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>5</sup>Then Aaron's sons shall turn these into smoke on the altar, with the burnt offering that is on the wood on the fire, as an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the LORD.

<sup>6</sup>If your offering for a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD is from the flock, male or female, you shall offer one without blemish. <sup>7</sup>If you present a sheep as your offering, you shall bring it before the LORD <sup>8</sup>and lay your hand on the head of the offering. It shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting, and Aaron's sons shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>9</sup>You shall present its fat from the sacrifice of well-being, as an offering by fire to the LORD: the whole broad tail, which shall be removed close to the backbone, the fat that

covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>10</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>11</sup>Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food offering by fire to the LORD.

<sup>12</sup>If your offering is a goat, you shall bring it before the LORD <sup>13</sup>and lay your hand on its head; it shall be slaughtered before the tent of meeting; and the sons of Aaron shall dash its blood against all sides of the altar. <sup>14</sup>You shall present as your offering from it, as an offering by fire to the LORD, the fat that covers the entrails, and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>15</sup>the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which you shall remove with the kidneys. <sup>16</sup>Then the priest shall turn these into smoke on the altar as a food offering by fire for a pleasing odor.

All fat is the LORD's. <sup>17</sup>It shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations, in all your settlements: you must not eat any fat or any blood.

**4** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>Speak to the people of Israel, saying: When anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them:

<sup>3</sup>If it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, he shall offer

**3.1–17: The well-being offering.** There are three subtypes of well-being offerings: thanksgiving, votive, and freewill (7.11–18; 22.21). The meaning of the Heb name of the offering, *shelamim*, is uncertain. Proposals include “gift,” “payment,” “communion,” “covenant,” “peace,” “whole,” and “salvific.” “Well-being” is preferable because the offering is motivated by the positive circumstance of its offerer. It is the only sacrifice whose meat may be consumed by laypersons (and not just priests). As such, it is a less holy offering (cf. 1.1–6.7n.; 7.19–21). According to the Priestly authors, all sacrificeable animals must be presented as offerings at the tabernacle if their meat is to be eaten (cf. 17.3–7). They serve as a communal feast between the Israelites and God. Both male and female herd (vv. 1–5) and flock animals (vv. 6–16) are eligible as well-being sacrifices, for their primary purpose is to provide meat for lay consumption. Portions of the sacrifice are burned on the altar (3.9–10, 14–15), and portions are designated for the priests (7.28–36), but the main share is retained by the offerer (7.15–21; 19.6–8). **1:** *Without blemish*, see 1.3n. **2:** *Lay your hand*, see 1.4n. *Dash the blood*, see 1.5n. **3–5:** The visceral fat and the organs are considered the most desirable portions and are thus reserved for God alone (cf. vv. 16–17). In Heb, *fat* often connotes “best.” **5:** *With the burnt offering*, referring to the statutory daily morning offering (Ex 29.38–42); *pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. **9:** *Broad tail*, the predominant species of sheep in the Levant has a fatty area surrounding the tail that can weigh up to 33 lb (15 kg). **16b–17:** See 17.10–14n.; Gen 9.4; Ezek 44.7. These verses are an H addition to P.

**4.1–6.7: Instructions for purification and reparation offerings.** Unlike gift offerings, which are spontaneous acts of worship, purification offerings are required to purge the sanctuary of ritual contamination

for the sin that he has committed a bull of the herd without blemish as a sin offering to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull; the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. <sup>5</sup> The anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting. <sup>6</sup> The priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the curtain of the sanctuary. <sup>7</sup> The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is in the tent of meeting before the LORD; and the rest of the blood of the bull he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>8</sup> He shall remove all the fat from the bull of sin offering: the fat that covers the entrails and all the fat that is around the entrails; <sup>9</sup> the two kidneys with the fat that

is on them at the loins; and the appendage of the liver, which he shall remove with the kidneys, <sup>10</sup> just as these are removed from the ox of the sacrifice of well-being. The priest shall turn them into smoke upon the altar of burnt offering. <sup>11</sup> But the skin of the bull and all its flesh, as well as its head, its legs, its entrails, and its dung— <sup>12</sup> all the rest of the bull—he shall carry out to a clean place outside the camp, to the ash heap, and shall burn it on a wood fire; at the ash heap it shall be burned.

<sup>13</sup> If the whole congregation of Israel errs unintentionally and the matter escapes the notice of the assembly, and they do any one of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done and incur guilt; <sup>14</sup> when the sin that they have committed becomes known, the assembly shall offer a bull of the herd for a sin offering and bring it before the tent of meeting. <sup>15</sup> The elders of the congregation shall lay their

caused by various sins and impurities. In H's view, the accumulation of sin and impurity in the tabernacle threatens the abiding presence of the deity. If God should depart, Israel will lose all divine protection and benefaction (Lev 26.30–33; cf. Ezek 8–11). P, however, appears not to countenance divine abandonment. It instead expects Israel to perform the requisite purgation, which eliminates any cause that might be posited for the deity's departure. In P, God's presence among the Israelites is wholly for his own benefit. The threat of divine abandonment, which is meant to motivate humans to serve the deity and in so doing preserve the benefits they enjoy from God's presence in their midst, is thus inconsistent with P's claims.

**4.1–35: The purification offering (Heb “ḥaṭṭa't”).** Traditionally translated “sin offering,” this sacrifice purifies the sanctuary from the defilement of sin or impurity, which are understood to be physical (if invisible) substances that are attracted to and accumulate at the sanctuary. The sacrifice is thus better translated “purification offering” or “purgation offering.” The purification offering's blood acts as a ritual detergent, cleansing the tabernacle complex from inadvertent transgressions of divine prohibitions. Numbers 15.22–31 expands the application of the purification offering to inadvertent transgression of all divine prescriptions, including positive commandments. Ch 4 considers inadvertent sins of four different parties: the high priest (vv. 3–12), the entire Israelite congregation (vv. 13–21), a chieftain (vv. 22–26), and an ordinary Israelite (vv. 27–35). The severity of the resulting sanctuary pollution relates to the status of the sinner and is reflected by the animal required for the offering and the locations where its blood is applied. Sins of the high priest and entire community penetrate into the outer room of the tabernacle (vv. 5–7, 16–18), while sins of a chieftain or ordinary layperson are less potent, accumulating only on the outer sacrificial altar (vv. 25, 30, 34). Ch 16 adds a third tier to this gradation: deliberate sins penetrate into and pollute the holy of holies, the inner sanctum of the deity, and must be cleansed annually on the day of purgations (16.11–17). **2:** *Unintentionally*, lit., “in error,” actions done in negligence or ignorance (cf. vv. 13–14). **3–12:** Offering of the high priest. **3:** *Without blemish*, see 1.3n. **4:** *Entrance of the tent of meeting*, see 1.3n. *Lay his hand*, see 1.4n. **6:** *Curtain*, Ex 26.31–33. Sprinkling blood purges the outer room of the tent. **7:** *Horns*, see Ex 27.2; 30.2–3. *The altar of fragrant incense* is in the outer room of the tabernacle (Ex 30.1–10); see plan on p. 120. Daubing blood on the altar's horns purges it from sin and pollution. The remainder of the blood is poured on the ground for disposal (cf. 17.13; Deut 12.16, 27). **8–10:** See 3.3–5. **11–12:** Unlike purification offerings from the flock (cf. 6.24–29), no meat from the bull purification offering may be eaten (cf. 6.30), presumably because the priest should not benefit from his own transgression. **13–21:** Offering

hands on the head of the bull before the LORD, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD. <sup>16</sup> The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the tent of meeting, <sup>17</sup> and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain. <sup>18</sup> He shall put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the tent of meeting; and the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>19</sup> He shall remove all its fat and turn it into smoke on the altar. <sup>20</sup> He shall do with the bull just as is done with the bull of sin offering; he shall do the same with this. The priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven. <sup>21</sup> He shall carry the bull outside the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering for the assembly.

<sup>22</sup> When a ruler sins, doing unintentionally any one of all the things that by commandments of the LORD his God ought not to be done and incurs guilt, <sup>23</sup> once the sin that he has committed is made known to him, he shall bring as his offering a male goat without blemish. <sup>24</sup> He shall lay his hand on the head of the goat; it shall be slaughtered at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD; it is a sin offering. <sup>25</sup> The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar of burnt offering.

<sup>26</sup> All its fat he shall turn into smoke on the altar, like the fat of the sacrifice of well-being. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf for his sin, and he shall be forgiven.

<sup>27</sup> If anyone of the ordinary people among you sins unintentionally in doing any one

of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done and incurs guilt, <sup>28</sup> when the sin that you have committed is made known to you, you shall bring a female goat without blemish as your offering, for the sin that you have committed. <sup>29</sup> You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering. <sup>30</sup> The priest shall take some of its blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and he shall pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. <sup>31</sup> He shall remove all its fat, as the fat is removed from the offering of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar for a pleasing odor to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf, and you shall be forgiven.

<sup>32</sup> If the offering you bring as a sin offering is a sheep, you shall bring a female without blemish. <sup>33</sup> You shall lay your hand on the head of the sin offering; and it shall be slaughtered as a sin offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered.

<sup>34</sup> The priest shall take some of the blood of the sin offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and pour out the rest of its blood at the base of the altar. <sup>35</sup> You shall remove all its fat, as the fat of the sheep is removed from the sacrifice of well-being, and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the LORD. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

**5** When any of you sin in that you have heard a public adjuration to testify and—though able to testify as one who has seen or learned of the matter—do not speak up, you are subject to punishment.

<sup>2</sup> Or when any of you touch any unclean thing—whether the carcass of an unclean

for the entire congregation. **20:** *For them*, meaning “on their behalf,” i.e., in response to their sin. *And they shall be forgiven*, forgiveness is assured once the required ritual procedure is accomplished. Though this concluding formula is omitted from the high priest's offering, it should be assumed there as well (cf. vv. 26,31,35). **22–26:** Offering for a chieftain (see 4:1–35n.). **22:** *Ruler* probably means “chieftain” or “clan leader” (see Num 1.16). **27–35:** Offering for an ordinary Israelite.

**5.1–13: Purification offerings for specific offenses.** This passage extends the scope of ch 4, detailing four specific sins that require purification offerings. In each case (v. 1, withholding testimony; v. 2,



beast or the carcass of unclean livestock or the carcass of an unclean swarming thing—and are unaware of it, you have become unclean, and are guilty.<sup>3</sup> Or when you touch human uncleanness—any uncleanness by which one can become unclean—and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall be guilty.<sup>4</sup> Or when any of you utter aloud a rash oath for a bad or a good purpose, whatever people utter in an oath, and are unaware of it, when you come to know it, you shall in any of these be guilty.<sup>5</sup> When you realize your guilt in any of these, you shall confess the sin that you have committed.<sup>6</sup> And you shall bring to the LORD, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, a female from the flock, a sheep or a goat, as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for your sin.

<sup>7</sup> But if you cannot afford a sheep, you shall bring to the LORD, as your penalty for the sin that you have committed, two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

<sup>8</sup> You shall bring them to the priest, who shall offer first the one for the sin offer-

ing, wringing its head at the nape without severing it.<sup>9</sup> He shall sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering on the side of the altar, while the rest of the blood shall be drained out at the base of the altar; it is a sin offering.<sup>10</sup> And the second he shall offer for a burnt offering according to the regulation. Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the sin that you have committed, and you shall be forgiven.

<sup>11</sup> But if you cannot afford two turtledoves or two pigeons, you shall bring as your offering for the sin that you have committed one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour for a sin offering; you shall not put oil on it or lay frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering.<sup>12</sup> You shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall scoop up a handful of it as its memorial portion, and turn this into smoke on the altar, with the offerings by fire to the LORD; it is a sin offering.<sup>13</sup> Thus the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for whichever of these sins you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. Like the grain offering, the rest shall be for the priest.

contracting impurity from an animal; v. 3, contracting impurity from a person; v. 4, failure to fulfill an oath due to negligence), the sin or pollution has persisted over a prolonged period (vv. 4–5). This lapse of time, which exacerbates the gravity of sin or pollution, unites the case of withholding testimony, which is premeditated, with the final three cases, which involve inadvertent actions. Vv. 1–4 each present the circumstance of a person's actions and state of mind but do not render a verdict or outline a required response, which comes only in vv. 5–13. 1: *You are subject to punishment*, lit., “and he bears his sin” (cf. 1.2n.). P portrays sin both as a weight of guilt shouldered by the offender until it is borne away through forgiveness and as a defiling object attracted to the sanctuary like certain metals to a magnet. Left unremedied, such sins will accumulate in the sanctuary and irritate the deity (cf. 16.1–34n.). 2–3: *You have become unclean, and are guilty*, emendation yields, “but he has realized it and now feels guilt.” For impurity contracted by touching animal carcasses, see 11.8,24–40. *When you come to know it, you shall be guilty*, lit., “but he has realized it and now feels guilt.” For impurity contracted by touching a human, see 15.4–10,19–24,26–27; Num 19.11–13,16. In each of these cases, had the person who contracted pollution immediately purified him- or herself, no purification offering would have been required. 4: *When you come to know it . . . be guilty*, lit., “but he has realized it and now feels guilt.” *In any of these* was inadvertently inserted here from v. 5 because the scribe's eye skipped. 5–6: The ritual procedure for sanctuary purification in these four cases requires confession as well as a purification offering, unlike the unintentional sins in ch 4. 7–13: Less costly alternatives for the purification offering. It is not clear whether these substitutions may be made only in cases of the four sins in vv. 1–4 or for any purification offering. 7: Two birds are necessary, one for the purifying blood, and the other for the fat pieces to be burned on the altar. 10: *According to the regulation*, see 1.14–17. 11–13: The substitution of a grain offering is a noteworthy accommodation because it includes no blood, the essential component of the purification offering. Because this grain offering is presented in response to wrongdoing, frankincense and oil, symbols of joy, are excluded from it. 11: *Ephah*, about 21 qts (23 L).

<sup>14</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

<sup>15</sup>When any of you commit a trespass and sin unintentionally in any of the holy things of the LORD, you shall bring, as your guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, convertible into silver by the sanctuary shekel; it is a guilt offering. <sup>16</sup>And you shall make restitution for the holy thing in which you were remiss, and shall add one-fifth to it and give it to the priest. The priest shall make atonement on your behalf with the ram of the guilt offering, and you shall be forgiven.

<sup>17</sup>If any of you sin without knowing it, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, you have incurred guilt, and are subject to punishment. <sup>18</sup>You shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish from the flock, or the equivalent, as a guilt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on your behalf for the error that you committed unintentionally, and you shall be forgiven. <sup>19</sup>It is a guilt offering; you have incurred guilt before the LORD.

**6**<sup>a</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup>When any of you sin and commit a trespass against the LORD by deceiving a neighbor in a matter of a deposit or a pledge, or by robbery, or if you have defrauded a neighbor, <sup>3</sup>or have found something lost and lied about

it—if you swear falsely regarding any of the various things that one may do and sin thereby—<sup>4</sup>when you have sinned and realize your guilt, and would restore what you took by robbery or by fraud or the deposit that was committed to you, or the lost thing that you found, <sup>5</sup>or anything else about which you have sworn falsely, you shall repay the principal amount and shall add one-fifth to it. You shall pay it to its owner when you realize your guilt. <sup>6</sup>And you shall bring to the priest, as your guilt offering to the LORD, a ram without blemish from the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering. <sup>7</sup>The priest shall make atonement on your behalf before the LORD, and you shall be forgiven for any of the things that one may do and incur guilt thereby.

<sup>8</sup><sup>b</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>9</sup>Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the burnt offering. The burnt offering itself shall remain on the hearth upon the altar all night until the morning, while the fire on the altar shall be kept burning. <sup>10</sup>The priest shall put on his linen vestments after putting on his linen undergarments next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering

<sup>a</sup> Ch 5.20 in Heb

<sup>b</sup> Ch 6.1 in Heb

**5.14–6.7: The reparation offering (Heb “asham”).** Traditionally translated “guilt offering,” this sacrifice serves as compensation for sacrilege against the sacred items (vv. 14–16), an unknown sin (vv. 17–19; the “unknown sin” is a common motif in Near Eastern texts), or fraud arising from a false oath (presumably spoken in the name of the LORD and thus sacrilege; 6.1–7). The cases of sacrilege require the offering and restitution plus damages (cf. 22.14). This sacrifice is thus better understood as a “reparation offering.” The ritual procedure for this “most holy” sacrifice is found in 7.1–6. **14–16:** Inadvertent trespass against sacred items. **15:** *Holy things*, the most holy sacrificial portions, the altar, and the tabernacle and its furnishings belong to and exist in close proximity to the deity. They are thus sacred. *Without blemish*, see 1.3n. **5.15,18; 6.6:** *Convertible into silver*, a person may bring the *equivalent* value of the offering in silver. **5.16,18; 6.7:** *Make atonement*, appease the deity on behalf of the sinner (cf. 7.1–6n.). **5.17–19:** Unknown sin. Though ambiguous, this case may differ from those addressed by the purification offering because here the person senses that he or she sinned, but the act itself is unknown. **6.1–7:** See Num 5.5–10 and contrast damages in Ex 22.7–15.

**6.8–7.38: Elaborations on the sacrificial instructions.** This section, which contains five divine speeches, offers further instructions for each of the offerings detailed in 1.1–6.7 and may represent a separate subsource. It focuses especially upon ritual performance, distribution of sacrificial pieces, and disposal procedures. The first three speeches are ostensibly directed to the priests alone (6.9–7.21), although the instructions in 7.11–21 are pertinent to both priests and laypersons. The final two speeches are directed to all of the Israelites (7.22–36), and 7.37–38 serves as a subscript to this section.

**6.8–13: The burnt offering.** Cf. 1.3–13. Alternatively, this may refer to the statutory daily burnt offerings (cf. Ex 29.38–42; Num 28.3–8). **9:** *Ritual*, better, “instruction” (Heb “torah”). **10–11:** The priestly garb is described in Ex 28.39–43. The linen garments must be worn in approaching the sacred altar, while nonsacral garb is worn for

on the altar, and place them beside the altar. <sup>11</sup> Then he shall take off his vestments and put on other garments, and carry the ashes out to a clean place outside the camp. <sup>12</sup> The fire on the altar shall be kept burning; it shall not go out. Every morning the priest shall add wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the offerings of well-being. <sup>13</sup> A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar; it shall not go out.

<sup>14</sup> This is the ritual of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it before the LORD, in front of the altar. <sup>15</sup> They shall take from it a handful of the choice flour and oil of the grain offering, with all the frankincense that is on the offering, and they shall turn its memorial portion into smoke on the altar as a pleasing odor to the LORD. <sup>16</sup> Aaron and his sons shall eat what is left of it; it shall be eaten as unleavened cakes in a holy place; in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it. <sup>17</sup> It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my offerings by fire; it is most holy, like the sin offering and the guilt offering. <sup>18</sup> Every male among the descendants of Aaron shall eat of it, as their perpetual due throughout your generations, from the LORD's offerings by fire; anything that touches them shall become holy.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>20</sup> This is the offering that Aaron and his sons shall

offer to the LORD on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour as a regular offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. <sup>21</sup> It shall be made with oil on a griddle; you shall bring it well soaked, as a grain offering of baked<sup>a</sup> pieces, and you shall present it as a pleasing odor to the LORD. <sup>22</sup> And so the priest, anointed from among Aaron's descendants as a successor, shall prepare it; it is the LORD's—a perpetual due—to be turned entirely into smoke. <sup>23</sup> Every grain offering of a priest shall be wholly burned; it shall not be eaten.

<sup>24</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>25</sup> Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the ritual of the sin offering. The sin offering shall be slaughtered before the LORD at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. <sup>26</sup> The priest who offers it as a sin offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place, in the court of the tent of meeting. <sup>27</sup> Whatever touches its flesh shall become holy; and when any of its blood is spattered on a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in a holy place. <sup>28</sup> An earthen vessel in which it was boiled shall be broken; but if it is boiled in a bronze vessel, that shall be scoured and rinsed in water. <sup>29</sup> Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it is most

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

ash disposal outside the camp. **12:** This verse may be punctuated differently: *lay out the burnt offering on it* may actually be a new sentence, viz., “He shall arrange the burnt offering upon it and turn into smoke the fat pieces of the well-being offering.” If so, this burnt offering is likely not the daily statutory offering (cf. 3.5). **12–13:** The perpetual fire maintains a direct link to the divine fire that ignites the altar in 9.24. It is God who consumes all sacrificial pieces burned on the altar.

**6.14–23: The grain offerings. 14–18:** These verses provide instructions for the grain offering described in 2.1–13. **14:** *Ritual*, see 6.9n. **15:** *Frankincense*, see 2.1n. *Pleasing odor*, see 1.9n. **16:** *Holy place*, the priests' portions of most holy offerings must be consumed within the sanctuary complex in order to ensure their sanctity and to avoid communicating holiness (cf. v. 18). *Court*, see Ex 27.9–19. **17:** *Offerings by fire*, see 1.1–3.17n. **18:** *Shall eat*, better, “may eat.” All males of Aaron's line are priests and thus may share in most holy sacrificial portions (cf. 21.22). Women belonging to priestly families may partake of lesser holy sacrificial portions assigned to the priests (22.10–13). *Become holy*, holiness is conceptualized as an invisible divine essence that is communicable through physical contact (cf. v. 27; Ex 29.37; 30.29; Ezek 44.19). **19–23:** These verses provide instructions for the statutory grain offerings that the high priest must present daily. **20:** *On the day when he is anointed*, better, “once he has been anointed.” Aaron, the first high priest, is not anointed until ch 8. This statute is also applicable to all future high priests (cf. v. 22). *Ephah*, see 5.11n.

**6.24–30: The purification offering. 24–29:** These verses provide instructions for purification offerings whose blood is applied to the outer altar (cf. 4.22–35). Portions of these most holy offerings may be eaten by the priests (see 1.1–6.7n.). **25:** *Sin offering*, see 4.1–35n. **26:** *Holy place*, see 6.16n. *Court*, see Ex 27.9–19. **27–28:** *Become holy*, see 6.18n. The blood of the purification offering seems to decontaminate by absorbing impurities,

holy.<sup>30</sup> But no sin offering shall be eaten from which any blood is brought into the tent of meeting for atonement in the holy place; it shall be burned with fire.

**7** This is the ritual of the guilt offering. It is most holy;<sup>2</sup> at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered, they shall slaughter the guilt offering, and its blood shall be dashed against all sides of the altar.<sup>3</sup> All its fat shall be offered: the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails,<sup>4</sup> the two kidneys with the fat that is on them at the loins, and the appendage of the liver, which shall be removed with the kidneys.<sup>5</sup> The priest shall turn them into smoke on the altar as an offering by fire to the LORD; it is a guilt offering.<sup>6</sup> Every male among the priests shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in a holy place; it is most holy.

<sup>7</sup> The guilt offering is like the sin offering, there is the same ritual for them; the priest who makes atonement with it shall have it.<sup>8</sup> So, too, the priest who offers anyone's burnt offering shall keep the skin of the burnt offering that he has offered.<sup>9</sup> And every grain offering baked in the oven, and all that is prepared in a pan or on a griddle, shall belong to the priest who offers it.<sup>10</sup> But every other grain offering, mixed with oil or dry, shall belong to all the sons of Aaron equally.

<sup>11</sup> This is the ritual of the sacrifice of the offering of well-being that one may offer to the LORD.<sup>12</sup> If you offer it for thanksgiving, you shall offer with the thank offering unleav-

ened cakes mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and cakes of choice flour well soaked in oil.<sup>13</sup> With your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being you shall bring your offering with cakes of leavened bread.<sup>14</sup> From this you shall offer one cake from each offering, as a gift to the LORD; it shall belong to the priest who dashes the blood of the offering of well-being.<sup>15</sup> And the flesh of your thanksgiving sacrifice of well-being shall be eaten on the day it is offered; you shall not leave any of it until morning.<sup>16</sup> But if the sacrifice you offer is a votive offering or a freewill offering, it shall be eaten on the day that you offer your sacrifice, and what is left of it shall be eaten the next day;<sup>17</sup> but what is left of the flesh of the sacrifice shall be burned up on the third day.<sup>18</sup> If any of the flesh of your sacrifice of well-being is eaten on the third day, it shall not be acceptable, nor shall it be credited to the one who offers it; it shall be an abomination, and the one who eats of it shall incur guilt.

<sup>19</sup> Flesh that touches any unclean thing shall not be eaten; it shall be burned up. As for other flesh, all who are clean may eat such flesh.<sup>20</sup> But those who eat flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being while in a state of uncleanness shall be cut off from their kin.<sup>21</sup> When any one of you touches any unclean thing—human uncleanness or an unclean animal or any unclean creature—and then eats flesh from the LORD's sacrifice of well-being, you shall be cut off from your kin.

which may explain how the offering in turn contaminates garments and vessels (cf. 10.16–20). **29:** *Shall eat*, better, “may eat” (cf. 6.18n.). **30:** This verse refers to the purification offering for more virulent contamination and any purification offering of a priest (cf. Ex 29.14; Lev 4.1–21; 6.23; 8.17; 9.11; 16.27).

**7.1–10:** **The reparation offering.** See 5.14–6.7n. **1:** *Ritual*, see 6.9n. *Guilt offering*, see 5.14–6.7n. **2:** *Its blood shall be dashed*, see 1.5n. **6:** *Shall eat*, better, “may eat” (cf. 6.18n.). **7–10:** These verses summarize some of the compensation given to the priests for their ritual activities (cf. Num 18.8–20).

**7.11–38:** **The well-being offerings.** Cf. 3.1–17; 22.21–23. This unit provides instructions for three different types of well-being offerings: thanksgiving, votive, and freewill. The thanksgiving offering (Heb “todah”) is more complex than the votive and freewill offerings, requiring accompanying grain offerings (cf. 2.4–10) and leavened bread (contrast 2.11–12). In addition, the thanksgiving offering may be eaten only on the day it is presented, while other well-being sacrifices may be consumed for two days. **11:** *Ritual*, see 6.9n. **13:** Lit., “The foregoing he shall offer with loaves of leavened bread, together with his well-being offering of thanksgiving.” **18:** *Acceptable*, better, “accepted” (cf. 1.4n.; 19.5–8; 22.17–30). *Incur guilt*, cf. 5.1n. **19–21:** Sacrificial portions are to be kept from impurity because, as holy food, they belong to God, who prefers not to come into contact with impurity (cf. 4.1–35n.; 11.1–16.34n.; 19.8). *Cut off*, this penalty is applied by the Priestly authors to several offenses against God and likely refers to the complete destruction of the of-

<sup>22</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:  
<sup>23</sup> Speak to the people of Israel, saying: You shall eat no fat of ox or sheep or goat. <sup>24</sup> The fat of an animal that died or was torn by wild animals may be put to any other use, but you must not eat it. <sup>25</sup> If any one of you eats the fat from an animal of which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD, you who eat it shall be cut off from your kin. <sup>26</sup> You must not eat any blood whatever, either of bird or of animal, in any of your settlements. <sup>27</sup> Any one of you who eats any blood shall be cut off from your kin.

<sup>28</sup> The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:  
<sup>29</sup> Speak to the people of Israel, saying: Any one of you who would offer to the LORD your sacrifice of well-being must yourself bring to the LORD your offering from your sacrifice of well-being. <sup>30</sup> Your own hands shall bring the LORD's offering by fire; you shall bring the fat with the breast, so that the breast may be raised as an elevation offering before the LORD. <sup>31</sup> The priest shall turn the fat into smoke on the altar, but the breast shall belong to Aaron and his sons. <sup>32</sup> And the right thigh from your sacrifices of well-being you shall give to the priest as an offering; <sup>33</sup> the one among the sons of Aaron who offers the blood and fat of the offering of well-being shall have the right thigh for a portion. <sup>34</sup> For I have taken the breast of the elevation offering, and the thigh that is offered, from the people of Israel, from their sacrifices of

well-being, and have given them to Aaron the priest and to his sons, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel. <sup>35</sup> This is the portion allotted to Aaron and to his sons from the offerings made by fire to the LORD, once they have been brought forward to serve the LORD as priests; <sup>36</sup> these the LORD commanded to be given them, when he anointed them, as a perpetual due from the people of Israel throughout their generations.

<sup>37</sup> This is the ritual of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the offering of ordination, and the sacrifice of well-being, <sup>38</sup> which the LORD commanded Moses on Mount Sinai, when he commanded the people of Israel to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai.

**8** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Take Aaron and his sons with him, the vestments, the anointing oil, the bull of sin offering, the two rams, and the basket of unleavened bread; <sup>3</sup> and assemble the whole congregation at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>4</sup> And Moses did as the LORD commanded him. When the congregation was assembled at the entrance of the tent of meeting, <sup>5</sup> Moses said to the congregation, "This is what the LORD has commanded to be done."

<sup>6</sup> Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. <sup>7</sup> He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash

fender's lineage. **22–27:** These commands develop further the prohibition against fat and blood in 3.17. **23:** *Ox or sheep or goat*, i.e., sacrificeable animals. **25,27:** *Cut off*, see 7.19–21n. **28–36:** The priests' portion of the well-being offering. **30:** *Elevation*, a ritual act, also found in other ancient Near Eastern cultures, dedicating the offering to the deity. **31–33:** The breast belongs to all of the priests, while the thigh is designated for the priest who officiates over the sacrifice. **37–38:** A summarizing postscript to 6.8–7.36. The inclusion of the ordination offering here may be due to its similarity to the well-being offering (cf. 8.22–32n.). **38:** *On Mount Sinai*, better, "at Mount Sinai," namely, at the tabernacle erected at the foot of the mountain after Moses's descent (Ex 34.29).

**8.1–10.20:** The dedication of the tabernacle and priests and the transgression of Aaron's sons. Chs 8–10 narrate the consecration of the tabernacle complex, the seven-day ordination of the priests, the inaugural priestly service on the eighth day that culminates in the revelation of the divine presence through fire, and the subsequent illicit ritual of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu.

**8.1–36:** The dedication of the tabernacle and priests. A fulfillment of the consecration rituals as instructed by God (cf. vv. 5,9,13,17,21,29,31,34) to Moses in Ex 28–29; 30.26–30; 40.9–15. This dedication appears here rather than immediately following the tabernacle building account in Ex 35–40 because it includes the performance of sacrifices whose instructions are only first given in Lev 1–7. **2:** *Anointing oil*, Ex 30.22–33; 37.29. *Bull of sin offering*, see Lev 4.3. For the offerings listed here, see Ex 29.1–3. **5:** *What the LORD has commanded*, i.e., Ex 29.7–9,13. For descriptions of the priestly vestments, see Ex 28.1–43; 39.1–31. The high priest's clothing is intended



around him, clothed him with the robe, and put the ephod on him. He then put the decorated band of the ephod around him, tying the ephod to him with it.<sup>8</sup> He placed the breastpiece on him, and in the breastpiece he put the Urim and the Thummim.<sup>9</sup> And he set the turban on his head, and on the turban, in front, he set the golden ornament, the holy crown, as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>10</sup> Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was in it, and consecrated them.<sup>11</sup> He sprinkled some of it on the altar seven times, and anointed the altar and all its utensils, and the basin and its base, to consecrate them.<sup>12</sup> He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him, to consecrate him.<sup>13</sup> And Moses brought forward Aaron's sons, and clothed them with tunics, and fastened sashes around them, and tied headdresses on them, as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>14</sup> He led forward the bull of sin offering; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bull of sin offering,<sup>15</sup> and it was slaughtered. Moses took the blood and with his finger put some on each of the horns of the altar, purifying the altar; then he poured out the blood at the base of the altar. Thus he consecrated it, to make atonement for it.<sup>16</sup> Moses took all the fat that was around the entrails, and the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat, and turned them into smoke on the altar.<sup>17</sup> But the bull itself, its skin and flesh and its dung, he burned with fire outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>18</sup> Then he brought forward the ram of burnt offering. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram,<sup>19</sup> and it was slaughtered. Moses dashed the blood against all sides of the altar.<sup>20</sup> The ram was cut into its parts, and Moses turned into smoke the head and the parts and the suet.<sup>21</sup> And after

the entrails and the legs were washed with water, Moses turned into smoke the whole ram on the altar; it was a burnt offering for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD, as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>22</sup> Then he brought forward the second ram, the ram of ordination. Aaron and his sons laid their hands on the head of the ram,<sup>23</sup> and it was slaughtered. Moses took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear and on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot.<sup>24</sup> After Aaron's sons were brought forward, Moses put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet; and Moses dashed the rest of the blood against all sides of the altar.

<sup>25</sup> He took the fat—the broad tail, all the fat that was around the entrails, the appendage of the liver, and the two kidneys with their fat—and the right thigh.<sup>26</sup> From the basket of unleavened bread that was before the LORD, he took one cake of unleavened bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer, and placed them on the fat and on the right thigh.<sup>27</sup> He placed all these on the palms of Aaron and on the palms of his sons, and raised them as an elevation offering before the LORD.<sup>28</sup> Then Moses took them from their hands and turned them into smoke on the altar with the burnt offering. This was an ordination offering for a pleasing odor, an offering by fire to the LORD.

<sup>29</sup> Moses took the breast and raised it as an elevation offering before the LORD; it was Moses' portion of the ram of ordination, as the LORD commanded Moses.

<sup>30</sup> Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his vestments, and also on his sons and their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.

for his "honor and beauty" (Ex 28.2) and distinguishes him from the other priests, whose ritual attire is simpler. **10–12,30:** Anointing infuses the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the priests with ritual holiness, setting them apart as the personal possessions of the deity and his ceremonial servants. Anointing with oil was a common transition rite for persons and objects in the ancient Near East (cf. 14.15–18,26–29) and was therefore also used in Israel to change the status of a commoner to king (e.g., 1 Sam 10.1; 16.13). **14–17:** 4.1–12. **18–21:** 1.10–13. **22–32:** *Ram of ordination*, cf. Ex 29.22–28,31–34. The ordination offering is similar (but not identical) to the well-being offering. It inaugurates the system for priestly compensation, as indicated by its name: *ordination*, lit., "filling (the hand)," refers to the assignment of part of the offerings to the priests. **23–24:** *Ear . . . thumb . . . big toe*, the



<sup>31</sup> And Moses said to Aaron and his sons, “Boil the flesh at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and eat it there with the bread that is in the basket of ordination offerings, as I was commanded, ‘Aaron and his sons shall eat it’; <sup>32</sup> and what remains of the flesh and the bread you shall burn with fire. <sup>33</sup> You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, until the day when your period of ordination is completed. For it will take seven days to ordain you; <sup>34</sup> as has been done today, the LORD has commanded to be done to make atonement for you. <sup>35</sup> You shall remain at the entrance of the tent of meeting day and night for seven days, keeping the LORD’s charge so that you do not die; for so I am commanded.” <sup>36</sup> Aaron and his sons did all the things that the LORD commanded through Moses.

**9** On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. <sup>2</sup> He said to Aaron, “Take a bull calf for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And say to the people of Israel, “Take a male goat for a sin offering; a calf and a lamb, yearlings without blemish, for a burnt offering; <sup>4</sup> and an ox and a ram for an offering of well-being to sacrifice before the LORD; and a grain offering mixed with oil. For today the LORD will appear to you.” <sup>5</sup> They brought what Moses commanded to the front of the tent of meeting; and the whole congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. <sup>6</sup> And Moses said, “This is the thing that the LORD

commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you.” <sup>7</sup> Then Moses said to Aaron, “Draw near to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering, and make atonement for yourself and for the people; and sacrifice the offering of the people, and make atonement for them; as the LORD has commanded.”

<sup>8</sup> Aaron drew near to the altar, and slaughtered the calf of the sin offering, which was for himself. <sup>9</sup> The sons of Aaron presented the blood to him, and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; and the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. <sup>10</sup> But the fat, the kidneys, and the appendage of the liver from the sin offering he turned into smoke on the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses; <sup>11</sup> and the flesh and the skin he burned with fire outside the camp.

<sup>12</sup> Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. Aaron’s sons brought him the blood, and he dashed it against all sides of the altar. <sup>13</sup> And they brought him the burnt offering piece by piece, and the head, which he turned into smoke on the altar. <sup>14</sup> He washed the entrails and the legs and, with the burnt offering, turned them into smoke on the altar.

<sup>15</sup> Next he presented the people’s offering. He took the goat of the sin offering that was for the people, and slaughtered it, and presented it as a sin offering like the first one. <sup>16</sup> He presented the burnt offering, and sacrificed it according to regulation. <sup>17</sup> He presented the grain offering, and, taking a

bodily extremities symbolize the entire person. **31:** Once the ordination process has begun, the priests may partake of the sacred offering portions. **33:** *It will take seven days to ordain you*, better, “He (i.e., God) will fill your hand for seven days.” Sacrifices are the possession of the deity, who shares a portion with the priests. **33–35:** The purification and ordination ritual is to be repeated for seven days (cf. Ex 29.35–37), during which the priests must remain in the sanctuary complex to preserve their purity. **36:** This verse covers the time period of the six remaining days of the priestly ordination. Priestly literature often describes the fulfillment of complex instructions through short report statements (cf. 16.34b).

**9.1–10.20: The inauguration of priestly service and the transgression of Nadab and Abihu.** Chs 9–10 narrate the events of the eighth day, i.e., the day after the consecration of the priests is completed. The priests perform their first sacrifices, and the divine glory appears to the people with fire, confirming the deity’s presence and approval of the priests’ ritual activities. Immediately following this joyous occasion, however, Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu, commit sacrilege by making an unauthorized incense offering, which prompts the divine fire to emerge once more to consume them. The deaths of Nadab and Abihu occasion further instructions for the priests.

**9.1–24: The inauguration of priestly service.** **4,6:** The deity’s appearance is the fire that emerges from the tabernacle (vv. 23–24; cf. Ex 40.38). **6–21:** While Moses performed the sacrificial ritual in lieu of the priests in

handful of it, he turned it into smoke on the altar, in addition to the burnt offering of the morning.

<sup>18</sup> He slaughtered the ox and the ram as a sacrifice of well-being for the people. Aaron's sons brought him the blood, which he dashed against all sides of the altar, <sup>19</sup> and the fat of the ox and of the ram—the broad tail, the fat that covers the entrails, the two kidneys and the fat on them,<sup>a</sup> and the appendage of the liver. <sup>20</sup> They first laid the fat on the breasts, and the fat was turned into smoke on the altar; <sup>21</sup> and the breasts and the right thigh Aaron raised as an elevation offering before the LORD, as Moses had commanded.

<sup>22</sup> Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them; and he came down after sacrificing the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the offering of well-being. <sup>23</sup> Moses and Aaron entered the tent of meeting, and then came out and blessed the people; and the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people. <sup>24</sup> Fire came out from the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

**10** Now Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each took his censer, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered unholy fire before the LORD, such as he had not commanded them. <sup>2</sup> And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. <sup>3</sup> Then Moses

said to Aaron, “This is what the LORD meant when he said,

“Through those who are near me

I will show myself holy,

and before all the people

I will be glorified.”

And Aaron was silent.

<sup>4</sup> Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, “Come forward, and carry your kinsmen away from the front of the sanctuary to a place outside the camp.” <sup>5</sup> They came forward and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had ordered. <sup>6</sup> And Moses said to Aaron and to his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Do not dishevel your hair, and do not tear your vestments, or you will die and wrath will strike all the congregation; but your kindred, the whole house of Israel, may mourn the burning that the LORD has sent. <sup>7</sup> You shall not go outside the entrance of the tent of meeting, or you will die; for the anointing oil of the LORD is on you.” And they did as Moses had ordered.

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD spoke to Aaron: <sup>9</sup> Drink no wine or strong drink, neither you nor your sons, when you enter the tent of meeting, that you may not die; it is a statute forever throughout your generations. <sup>10</sup> You are to distinguish between the holy and the com-

<sup>a</sup> Gk: Heb *the broad tail, and that which covers, and the kidneys*

ch 8, here the priests, having been fully ordained, perform the sacrifices as described in chs 1–5. **22–23:** *Lifted his hands*, a ritual action accompanying the blessing. The people receive two blessings—one from Aaron and one from Moses and Aaron together. For a priestly blessing, see Num 6.22–27. **22:** *Came down*, an anachronistic reference to the altar of burnt offering in the Temple, which was elevated (cf. 2 Kings 16.10–13; Ezek 43.13–17). The tabernacle's altar was portable and had no steps (Ex 27.1). **23–24:** God's fiery *glory* is also manifested in the cloud and fire pillar that led the Israelites out of Egypt and through the wilderness, and that rested over the tent of meeting (Ex 13.21; 40.38; Num 9.15–23); see also Ex 24.17; Ezek 1.27–28. **24:** *They shouted*, for joy, not out of fear. Prostration is a ritual act of submission.

**10.1–20: The transgression of Nadab and Abihu.** **1:** *Unholy fire*, lit., “strange fire,” referring to the unauthorized incense offering. **2:** *Fire*, because God had not instructed the priests to present incense offerings, the fire that would consume the offerings instead consumed Nadab and Abihu. The Korah rebellion ends similarly with divine fire consuming the offerers of illicit incense (Num 16.35). For God viewed as a consuming fire in P, see Ex 24.17. **3:** *When he said*, perhaps referring to Ex 29.43–44, but more likely quoting a text that is now lost. **4–7:** Because of their ritual holiness, the priests are not allowed to contact a corpse or to mourn for the dead (though cf. 21.1–6, 10–12, which permit limited mourning). **8–11:** These verses, the only instance in Leviticus of God speaking to Aaron alone, are likely an H insertion into P. The stated mourning restrictions motivate the introduction of further priestly responsibilities. **10:** *The holy and the common . . . the unclean and the clean*, the two fundamental binary distinctions in Priestly literature. All persons, objects, and places are characterized by

mon, and between the unclean and the clean; <sup>11</sup> and you are to teach the people of Israel all the statutes that the LORD has spoken to them through Moses.

<sup>12</sup> Moses spoke to Aaron and to his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar: Take the grain offering that is left from the LORD's offerings by fire, and eat it unleavened beside the altar, for it is most holy; <sup>13</sup> you shall eat it in a holy place, because it is your due and your sons' due, from the offerings by fire to the LORD; for so I am commanded. <sup>14</sup> But the breast that is elevated and the thigh that is raised, you and your sons and daughters as well may eat in any clean place; for they have been assigned to you and your children from the sacrifices of the offerings of well-being of the people of Israel. <sup>15</sup> The thigh that is raised and the breast that is elevated they shall bring, together with the offerings by fire of the fat, to raise for an elevation offering before the LORD; they are to be your due and that of your children forever, as the LORD has commanded.

<sup>16</sup> Then Moses made inquiry about the goat of the sin offering, and—it had already been burned! He was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and said, <sup>17</sup> "Why did you not eat the sin offering in the sacred area? For it is most holy, and God<sup>a</sup> has given it to you that you may remove the guilt of the congregation, to make atonement on their behalf before the LORD. <sup>18</sup> Its blood was not brought into the inner part of the sanctuary. You should certainly have eaten it in the sanctuary, as I commanded." <sup>19</sup> And Aaron spoke to Moses, "See, today they offered their sin offering and their burnt offering before the LORD; and yet such things as these have befallen me! If I had eaten the sin offering today, would it have been agreeable to the LORD?" <sup>20</sup> And when Moses heard that, he agreed.

**11** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying to them: <sup>2</sup> Speak to the people of Israel, saying:

<sup>a</sup> Heb *he*

one quality of each pair: holy and clean (e.g., the properly functioning sanctuary, including its priests); common and clean (the default status of lay Israelites not suffering from impurities such as found in chs 11–15 and Num 19); common and impure (e.g., lay Israelites suffering from impurity); and, less frequently, holy and impure (such as holy ritual items that become impure during the course of purification rituals, e.g., purification offering carcasses, cf. 6.27–28; 16.26–28). **11:** *To teach . . . all the statutes*, better, "to give rulings regarding all the statutes." The priests do not actively instruct the people in the law (cf. Hag 2.11–13). **12–15:** Cf. 7.11–14, 28–36. Aaron and his remaining sons must complete the rituals as prescribed, even after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. **16–20:** A somewhat enigmatic section, in which Moses is upset that the priests did not consume the people's purification offering, although he never explicitly commanded them to do so in ch 9. V. 17 suggests that the priestly consumption of the offering itself is expiatory (cf. 6.24–30, although these verses imply that eating the purification offering is a privilege, not a requirement). Aaron's response is unclear, yet Moses accepts it, perhaps because of the unique circumstance of the eighth day.

**11.1–16.34: Ritual impurity and purification.** Chs 11–16 narrate divine instructions concerning impurity and various processes for purification. In Priestly literature, impurity is a real, though invisible, film that adheres to persons and objects and is attracted to the tabernacle as some metals are attracted to a magnet. However, impurity is fundamentally different from sin: impurity is contracted in the course of normal, daily activities and carries no moral stigma (see further 10.10n.). Yet because impurity is contagious and vexes the deity in the sanctuary, the Israelites must carefully dispose of it. Therefore failure to purify is sinful and carries dire consequences (cf. 15.31). The sources of impurity are human and animal corpses (ch 11; Num 19), normal and abnormal genital discharges (chs 12; 15), and a disease, "surface affliction," often mistranslated as "leprosy" (chs 13–14). The common denominator among these sources of impurity may be their association with death or loss of life force. In cases of minor impurity, purification is accomplished through some combination of bathing, laundering, and the passage of time. In addition to these rites, major impurities also require presentation of a purification offering to cleanse the sanctuary, for major impurities penetrate into the tabernacle complex. Because of their regular contact with the sanctuary and the threat of its contamination, priests are required to avoid virtually all impurity (cf. 21.1–15).

**11.1–47: Dietary laws.** The dietary laws provide a bridge between the sacrificial instructions that precede them and the following purity rules. In their concern for meat consumption, the instructions in ch 11 correlate

From among all the land animals, these are the creatures that you may eat.<sup>3</sup> Any animal that has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed and chews the cud—such you may eat.<sup>4</sup> But among those that chew the cud or have divided hoofs, you shall not eat the following: the camel, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.<sup>5</sup> The rock badger, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.<sup>6</sup> The hare, for even though it chews the cud, it does not have divided hoofs; it is unclean for you.<sup>7</sup> The pig, for even though it has divided hoofs and is cleft-footed, it does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you.<sup>8</sup> Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch; they are unclean for you.

<sup>9</sup> These you may eat, of all that are in the waters. Everything in the waters that has fins and scales, whether in the seas or in the streams—such you may eat.<sup>10</sup> But anything in the seas or the streams that does not have fins and scales, of the swarming creatures in the waters and among all the other living creatures that are in the waters—they are detestable to you<sup>11</sup> and detestable they shall remain. Of their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall regard as detestable.<sup>12</sup> Everything in the waters that does not have fins and scales is detestable to you.

<sup>13</sup> These you shall regard as detestable among the birds. They shall not be eaten; they are an abomination: the eagle, the vulture, the osprey,<sup>14</sup> the buzzard, the kite of any

kind;<sup>15</sup> every raven of any kind;<sup>16</sup> the ostrich, the nighthawk, the sea gull, the hawk of any kind;<sup>17</sup> the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl,<sup>18</sup> the water hen, the desert owl,<sup>a</sup> the carrion vulture,<sup>19</sup> the stork, the heron of any kind, the hoopoe, and the bat.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>20</sup> All winged insects that walk upon all fours are detestable to you.<sup>21</sup> But among the winged insects that walk on all fours you may eat those that have jointed legs above their feet, with which to leap on the ground.<sup>22</sup> Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind.<sup>23</sup> But all other winged insects that have four feet are detestable to you.

<sup>24</sup> By these you shall become unclean; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until the evening,<sup>25</sup> and whoever carries any part of the carcass of any of them shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening.<sup>26</sup> Every animal that has divided hoofs but is not cleft-footed or does not chew the cud is unclean for you; everyone who touches one of them shall be unclean.<sup>27</sup> All that walk on their paws, among the animals that walk on all fours, are unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them shall be unclean until the evening,<sup>28</sup> and the one who carries the

<sup>a</sup> Or *pelican*

<sup>b</sup> Identification of several of the birds in verses 13-19 is uncertain

strongly with the sacrificial laws, which themselves outline the foods that the deity eats and restrict meat consumption according to its sanctity. A comparison of the sacrificial and dietary laws reveals that the Israelite God has the most restrictive diet, followed by the priests, the Israelite laypersons, and finally non-Israelites. By following the dietary rules, the Israelites observe the order of creation and are separated from the other nations. Such separateness is a fundamental component of holiness (vv. 44–45). Ch 11 also looks forward to the issues of impurity and its disposal in chs 12–16, for animals deemed unsuitable for consumption are termed impure, and contact with their corpses explicitly defiles. **2b–23:** Cf. Deut 14.3–21. It is likely that a common source stands behind these two texts. **2b–8:** Permitted large land animals must have split hooves and chew their cud. The examples of prohibited animals suggests that undomesticated animals are the main focus of this chapter (see 1.2n.; 17.1–16n.). **5–6:** Contrary to these verses' claims, the *rock badger* and *hare* do not have multichambered stomachs and thus are not ruminants. It is likely that the mouth movements typical of these animals led to the claim that they chewed cud. **9–12:** Permitted water creatures must have fins and scales. **13–19:** Rather than providing dual characteristics, as with large land animals and sea creatures, a list of prohibited birds is provided. **20–23:** Winged insects are generally forbidden. The only exceptions are those with jumping legs, which are specifically enumerated. **24–40:** Laws concerning impurity contracted through contact with animal corpses. Generally speaking, more intense contact (e.g., carrying or eating vs. touching) requires more complex purifica-

carcass shall wash his clothes and be unclean until the evening; they are unclean for you.

<sup>29</sup> These are unclean for you among the creatures that swarm upon the earth: the weasel, the mouse, the great lizard according to its kind, <sup>30</sup> the gecko, the land crocodile, the lizard, the sand lizard, and the chameleon. <sup>31</sup> These are unclean for you among all that swarm; whoever touches one of them when they are dead shall be unclean until the evening. <sup>32</sup> And anything upon which any of them falls when they are dead shall be unclean, whether an article of wood or cloth or skin or sacking, any article that is used for any purpose; it shall be dipped into water, and it shall be unclean until the evening, and then it shall be clean. <sup>33</sup> And if any of them falls into any earthen vessel, all that is in it shall be unclean, and you shall break the vessel. <sup>34</sup> Any food that could be eaten shall be unclean if water from any such vessel comes upon it; and any liquid that could be drunk shall be unclean if it was in any such vessel. <sup>35</sup> Everything on which any part of the carcass falls shall be unclean; whether an oven or stove, it shall be broken in pieces; they are unclean, and shall remain unclean for you. <sup>36</sup> But a spring or a cistern holding water shall be clean, while whatever touches the carcass in it shall be unclean. <sup>37</sup> If any part of their carcass falls upon any seed set aside for sowing, it is clean; <sup>38</sup> but if water is put on the seed and any part of their carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.

<sup>39</sup> If an animal of which you may eat dies, anyone who touches its carcass shall be unclean until the evening. <sup>40</sup> Those who eat of its carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening; and those who

carry the carcass shall wash their clothes and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>41</sup> All creatures that swarm upon the earth are detestable; they shall not be eaten. <sup>42</sup> Whatever moves on its belly, and whatever moves on all fours, or whatever has many feet, all the creatures that swarm upon the earth, you shall not eat; for they are detestable. <sup>43</sup> You shall not make yourselves detestable with any creature that swarms; you shall not defile yourselves with them, and so become unclean. <sup>44</sup> For I am the LORD your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth. <sup>45</sup> For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; you shall be holy, for I am holy.

<sup>46</sup> This is the law pertaining to land animal and bird and every living creature that moves through the waters and every creature that swarms upon the earth, <sup>47</sup> to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the living creature that may be eaten and the living creature that may not be eaten.

**12** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:

<sup>2</sup> Speak to the people of Israel, saying: If a woman conceives and bears a male child, she shall be ceremonially unclean seven days; as at the time of her menstruation, she shall be unclean. <sup>3</sup> On the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. <sup>4</sup> Her time of blood purification shall be thirty-three days; she shall not touch any holy thing, or come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purification are completed. <sup>5</sup> If she bears a female child, she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her menstruation; her time of blood purification shall be sixty-six days.

tion rites. **41–45:** Small land animals are forbidden. *Be holy, for I am holy*, see 11.1–47n., 19.2n. **43,44:** *Defile yourselves*, see 18.2on. **46–47:** A typical Priestly summary postscript. **46:** *Law*: better, “instruction” (Heb “torah”).

**12.1–8: Childbirth.** Childbirth produces impurity because of the mother’s postpartum flow of blood, which is viewed as analogous to menstruation (cf. vv. 2,5). The period of impurity differs according to the sex of the child and is divided into a shorter, major phase (seven or fourteen days) and a longer, minor phase (thirty-three or sixty-six days). In each case, the entire period of impurity is a multiple of forty, a common biblical number representing completion. **2–5:** *As at the time of her menstruation*, see 15.19–24. Because this reference anticipates ch 15, it is possible that the purity laws were once ordered differently, with ch 12 following ch 15. During the initial, major phase, the parturient can contaminate the sanctuary as well as common objects and persons through physical contact. During the subsequent, minor phase, her impurity only threatens to contaminate the sanctuary. **3:** Circumcision is unrelated to impurity or purification. It is mentioned here because it is performed on the eighth day after birth (see Gen 17.12) and thus immediately follows the initial seven-day period

<sup>6</sup> When the days of her purification are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb in its first year for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering. <sup>7</sup> He shall offer it before the LORD, and make atonement on her behalf; then she shall be clean from her flow of blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, male or female. <sup>8</sup> If she cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf, and she shall be clean.

**13** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

<sup>2</sup> When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling or an eruption or a spot, and it turns into a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease on the skin of his body, he shall be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons the priests.

<sup>3</sup> The priest shall examine the disease on the skin of his body, and if the hair in the diseased area has turned white and the disease appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease; after the priest has examined him he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. <sup>4</sup> But if the spot is white in the skin of his body, and appears no deeper than the skin, and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall confine the diseased person for seven days. <sup>5</sup> The priest

shall examine him on the seventh day, and if he sees that the disease is checked and the disease has not spread in the skin, then the priest shall confine him seven days more.

<sup>6</sup> The priest shall examine him again on the seventh day, and if the disease has abated and the disease has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only an eruption; and he shall wash his clothes, and be clean. <sup>7</sup> But if the eruption spreads in the skin after he has shown himself to the priest for his cleansing, he shall appear again before the priest. <sup>8</sup> The priest shall make an examination, and if the eruption has spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease.

<sup>9</sup> When a person contracts a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease, he shall be brought to the priest.

<sup>10</sup> The priest shall make an examination, and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white, and there is quick raw flesh in the swelling, <sup>11</sup> it is a chronic leprous<sup>a</sup> disease in the skin of his body. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; he shall not confine him, for he is unclean. <sup>12</sup> But if the disease breaks out in the skin, so that it covers all the skin of the diseased person from head to foot, so far as the priest can see, <sup>13</sup> then the priest shall make an examination, and if the disease has covered all his body,

<sup>a</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

of impurity. 6–8: *Sin offering*, better, “purification offering”; see 4.1–35n. The new mother has committed no sin; she must present a purification offering because her impurity polluted the altar (see 4.1–35n.). Verse 8 is an addendum that follows the original ending of the law in v. 7b, providing a more affordable sacrificial option for a poor mother. 7: *Law*, see 11.46n.

**13.1–14.57: Surface afflictions.** Though consolidated under a single term (Heb “tsara’at”) traditionally translated “leprosy,” the surface afflictions described in these chapters are not modern leprosy (Hansen’s disease), which was likely unknown in the ancient Near East when these texts were written. The inclusion of conditions affecting fabrics and houses alongside human disease also rules out modern leprosy, as do the symptoms of the human diseases described. The Priestly authors do not view disease in general as causing impurity; surface affliction likely causes impurity because it is associated with death (cf. Num 12.12).

**13.1–46: Surface affliction on humans.** Various symptoms are enumerated for determining whether a condition is surface affliction. In each case, the priest must give a ruling regarding the skin disease, differentiating between clean and unclean (cf. 10.10). The skin conditions most consistent with the various symptoms described include eczema, psoriasis, and vitiligo. 2: *He shall be brought*, perhaps “It shall be reported.” In either case, others in the community have an interest in diagnosing surface affliction not because the disease is contagious but because the impurity it produces contaminates the sanctuary. 3: *Examine*, without touching the affected skin, for the impurity of surface affliction is communicable. *His body*, or her body: the law applies to both men and women (cf. vv. 2, 29). 4: *The priest shall confine*, in order to determine whether the skin disease



he shall pronounce him clean of the disease; since it has all turned white, he is clean. <sup>14</sup> But if raw flesh ever appears on him, he shall be unclean; <sup>15</sup> the priest shall examine the raw flesh and pronounce him unclean. Raw flesh is unclean, for it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease. <sup>16</sup> But if the raw flesh again turns white, he shall come to the priest; <sup>17</sup> the priest shall examine him, and if the disease has turned white, the priest shall pronounce the diseased person clean. He is clean.

<sup>18</sup> When there is on the skin of one's body a boil that has healed, <sup>19</sup> and in the place of the boil there appears a white swelling or a reddish-white spot, it shall be shown to the priest. <sup>20</sup> The priest shall make an examination, and if it appears deeper than the skin and its hair has turned white, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; this is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease, broken out in the boil. <sup>21</sup> But if the priest examines it and the hair on it is not white, nor is it deeper than the skin but has abated, the priest shall confine him seven days. <sup>22</sup> If it spreads in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is diseased. <sup>23</sup> But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread, it is the scar of the boil; the priest shall pronounce him clean.

<sup>24</sup> Or, when the body has a burn on the skin and the raw flesh of the burn becomes a spot, reddish-white or white, <sup>25</sup> the priest shall examine it. If the hair in the spot has turned white and it appears deeper than the skin, it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease; it has broken out in the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. This is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease. <sup>26</sup> But if the priest examines it and the hair in the spot is not white, and it is no deeper than the skin but has abated, the priest shall confine him seven days. <sup>27</sup> The priest shall examine him the seventh day; if it is spreading in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean. This is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease. <sup>28</sup> But if the spot remains in one place and does not spread in the skin but has abated, it is a swelling from the burn, and the priest shall pronounce him clean; for it is the scar of the burn.

<sup>29</sup> When a man or woman has a disease on the head or in the beard, <sup>30</sup> the priest shall

examine the disease. If it appears deeper than the skin and the hair in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an itch, a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease of the head or the beard. <sup>31</sup> If the priest examines the itching disease, and it appears no deeper than the skin and there is no black hair in it, the priest shall confine the person with the itching disease for seven days. <sup>32</sup> On the seventh day the priest shall examine the itch; if the itch has not spread, and there is no yellow hair in it, and the itch appears to be no deeper than the skin, <sup>33</sup> he shall shave, but the itch he shall not shave. The priest shall confine the person with the itch for seven days more. <sup>34</sup> On the seventh day the priest shall examine the itch; if the itch has not spread in the skin and it appears to be no deeper than the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean. He shall wash his clothes and be clean. <sup>35</sup> But if the itch spreads in the skin after he was pronounced clean, <sup>36</sup> the priest shall examine him. If the itch has spread in the skin, the priest need not seek for the yellow hair; he is unclean. <sup>37</sup> But if in his eyes the itch is checked, and black hair has grown in it, the itch is healed, he is clean; and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

<sup>38</sup> When a man or a woman has spots on the skin of the body, white spots, <sup>39</sup> the priest shall make an examination, and if the spots on the skin of the body are of a dull white, it is a rash that has broken out on the skin; he is clean.

<sup>40</sup> If anyone loses the hair from his head, he is bald but he is clean. <sup>41</sup> If he loses the hair from his forehead and temples, he has baldness of the forehead but he is clean.

<sup>42</sup> But if there is on the bald head or the bald forehead a reddish-white diseased spot, it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease breaking out on his bald head or his bald forehead. <sup>43</sup> The priest shall examine him; if the diseased swelling is reddish-white on his bald head or on his bald forehead, which resembles a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease in the skin of the body, <sup>44</sup> he is leprous,<sup>a</sup> he

<sup>a</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

produces impurity and to limit exposure to impurity in the event that it is surface affliction. 38–44: These verses consider difficult cases and supplement vv. 2–37 by focusing upon skin conditions that do not cause

is unclean. The priest shall pronounce him unclean; the disease is on his head.

<sup>45</sup>The person who has the leprous<sup>a</sup> disease shall wear torn clothes and let the hair of his head be disheveled; and he shall cover his upper lip and cry out, “Unclean, unclean.” <sup>46</sup>He shall remain unclean as long as he has the disease; he is unclean. He shall live alone; his dwelling shall be outside the camp.

<sup>47</sup>Concerning clothing: when a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease appears in it, in woolen or linen cloth, <sup>48</sup>in warp or woof of linen or wool, or in a skin or in anything made of skin, <sup>49</sup>if the disease shows greenish or reddish in the garment, whether in warp or woof or in skin or in anything made of skin, it is a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease and shall be shown to the priest. <sup>50</sup>The priest shall examine the disease, and put the diseased article aside for seven days. <sup>51</sup>He shall examine the disease on the seventh day. If the disease has spread in the cloth, in warp or woof, or in the skin, whatever be the use of the skin, this is a spreading leprous<sup>a</sup> disease; it is unclean. <sup>52</sup>He shall burn the clothing, whether diseased in warp or woof, woolen or linen, or anything of skin, for it is a spreading leprous<sup>a</sup> disease; it shall be burned in fire.

<sup>53</sup>If the priest makes an examination, and the disease has not spread in the clothing, in warp or woof or in anything of skin, <sup>54</sup>the priest shall command them to wash the article in which the disease appears, and he shall put it aside seven days more. <sup>55</sup>The priest shall examine the diseased article after it has been washed. If the diseased spot has not changed color, though the disease has not spread, it is unclean; you shall burn it in fire,

whether the leprous<sup>a</sup> spot is on the inside or on the outside.

<sup>56</sup>If the priest makes an examination, and the disease has abated after it is washed, he shall tear the spot out of the cloth, in warp or woof, or out of skin. <sup>57</sup>If it appears again in the garment, in warp or woof, or in anything of skin, it is spreading; you shall burn with fire that in which the disease appears. <sup>58</sup>But the cloth, warp or woof, or anything of skin from which the disease disappears when you have washed it, shall then be washed a second time, and it shall be clean.

<sup>59</sup>This is the ritual for a leprous<sup>a</sup> disease in a cloth of wool or linen, either in warp or woof, or in anything of skin, to decide whether it is clean or unclean.

**14** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:  
<sup>2</sup>This shall be the ritual for the leprous<sup>a</sup> person at the time of his cleansing:

He shall be brought to the priest; <sup>3</sup>the priest shall go out of the camp, and the priest shall make an examination. If the disease is healed in the leprous<sup>a</sup> person, <sup>4</sup>the priest shall command that two living clean birds and cedarwood and crimson yarn and hyssop be brought for the one who is to be cleansed. <sup>5</sup>The priest shall command that one of the birds be slaughtered over fresh water in an earthen vessel. <sup>6</sup>He shall take the living bird with the cedarwood and the crimson yarn and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was slaughtered over the fresh water. <sup>7</sup>He shall sprinkle

<sup>a</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

impurity. **45–46:** The afflicted person dresses as a mourner (cf. 10.6; Ezek 24.17,22) because of the association between surface affliction and death. *He shall live alone . . . outside the camp*, cf. 2 Kings 7.3–8; 15.5; 2 Chr 26.21; Lk 17.12. Separation from the camp limits the spread of impurity, but impurity still contaminates the sanctuary (cf. 14.1–32).

**13.47–59: Surface affliction on cloth.** Illustrating the systematization of Priestly thought, the instructions for fabrics are similar in structure and detail to the preceding instructions for skin diseases. The surface affliction includes various forms of mold, fungus, and mildew. **51:** Unlike a person with surface affliction, an afflicted fabric, like the twice-afflicted house (14.45), cannot be cleansed. **59:** Summary postscript for vv. 47–59, which interrupts 13.1–46 and 14.1–32. *Ritual*, see 6.9n.

**14.1–32: Purification after surface affliction.** The ritual here does not heal surface affliction; it only purifies the already healed individual; the priest performs it only after confirming the person’s recovery (v. 3). **2:** *Ritual*, see 6.9n. *He shall be brought*, better, “It shall be reported,” cf. v. 3. **4–7:** The same ritual is found in vv. 49–53 for purifying houses. **4:** Many of the materials in this verse probably have symbolic significance and are well attested in biblical and other ancient Near Eastern rituals (cf. Ex 12.22; Num 19.6; Job 9.19; Ps 51.7). **6–7:** The person’s

it seven times upon the one who is to be cleansed of the leprous<sup>a</sup> disease; then he shall pronounce him clean, and he shall let the living bird go into the open field. <sup>8</sup>The one who is to be cleansed shall wash his clothes, and shave off all his hair, and bathe himself in water, and he shall be clean. After that he shall come into the camp, but shall live outside his tent seven days. <sup>9</sup>On the seventh day he shall shave all his hair: of head, beard, eyebrows; he shall shave all his hair. Then he shall wash his clothes, and bathe his body in water, and he shall be clean.

<sup>10</sup>On the eighth day he shall take two male lambs without blemish, and one ewe lamb in its first year without blemish, and a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil, and one log<sup>b</sup> of oil. <sup>11</sup>The priest who cleanses shall set the person to be cleansed, along with these things, before the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>12</sup>The priest shall take one of the lambs, and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log<sup>b</sup> of oil, and raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. <sup>13</sup>He shall slaughter the lamb in the place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered in the holy place; for the guilt offering, like the sin offering, belongs to the priest: it is most holy. <sup>14</sup>The priest shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall take some of the log<sup>b</sup> of oil and pour it into the palm of his own left hand, <sup>16</sup>and dip his right finger in the oil that is in his left hand and sprinkle some oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. <sup>17</sup>Some of the oil that remains in his hand the priest shall put on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot, on top of the blood of

the guilt offering. <sup>18</sup>The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed. Then the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD: <sup>19</sup>the priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. Afterward he shall slaughter the burnt offering; <sup>20</sup>and the priest shall offer the burnt offering and the grain offering on the altar. Thus the priest shall make atonement on his behalf and he shall be clean.

<sup>21</sup>But if he is poor and cannot afford so much, he shall take one male lamb for a guilt offering to be elevated, to make atonement on his behalf, and one-tenth of an ephah of choice flour mixed with oil for a grain offering and a log<sup>b</sup> of oil; <sup>22</sup>also two turtledoves or two pigeons, such as he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. <sup>23</sup>On the eighth day he shall bring them for his cleansing to the priest, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, before the LORD; <sup>24</sup>and the priest shall take the lamb of the guilt offering and the log<sup>b</sup> of oil, and the priest shall raise them as an elevation offering before the LORD. <sup>25</sup>The priest shall slaughter the lamb of the guilt offering and shall take some of the blood of the guilt offering, and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of the right foot. <sup>26</sup>The priest shall pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, <sup>27</sup>and shall sprinkle with his right finger some of the oil that is in his left hand seven times before the LORD. <sup>28</sup>The priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, and on

<sup>a</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

<sup>b</sup> A liquid measure

impurity is purged by the sprinkling of blood and transferred to the living bird, which carries it away (cf. the goat in 16.21–22). **8–9:** The staged transition constitutes a rite of passage from impure to pure and underscores the severity of impurity caused by surface affliction. **10–20:** The eighth-day sacrifices purge the tabernacle of impurity (cf. 4.1–6.7). **10:** *Ephah*, about 21 qts (23 L). *Log*, about 11 oz (.32 l). **12:** *Guilt offering*, better, “reparation offering”; see 5.14–6.7n. *Elevation offering*, see 7.30n. **14,17,25,28:** For smearing of blood and oil and the significance of the ear, thumb, and toe, see 8.10–12,30n.; 8.23–24n. **20:** *And he shall be clean*, a summary statement for the foregoing purification rituals. The sacrifices purify the tabernacle, not the person. **21–32:** More affordable provisions for purification (cf. 2.1–16n.; 5.7–13n.; 12.6–8n.).

the thumb of the right hand, and the big toe of the right foot, where the blood of the guilt offering was placed.<sup>29</sup> The rest of the oil that is in the priest's hand he shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement on his behalf before the LORD.<sup>30</sup> And he shall offer, of the turtledoves or pigeons such as he can afford,<sup>31</sup> one<sup>a</sup> for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering, along with a grain offering; and the priest shall make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one being cleansed.<sup>32</sup> This is the ritual for the one who has a leprous<sup>b</sup> disease, who cannot afford the offerings for his cleansing.

<sup>33</sup>The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:

<sup>34</sup>When you come into the land of Canaan, which I give you for a possession, and I put a leprous<sup>b</sup> disease in a house in the land of your possession,<sup>35</sup> the owner of the house shall come and tell the priest, saying, "There seems to me to be some sort of disease in my house."<sup>36</sup> The priest shall command that they empty the house before the priest goes to examine the disease, or all that is in the house will become unclean; and afterward the priest shall go in to inspect the house.<sup>37</sup> He shall examine the disease; if the disease is in the walls of the house with greenish or reddish spots, and if it appears to be deeper than the surface,<sup>38</sup> the priest shall go outside to the door of the house and shut up the house seven days.<sup>39</sup> The priest shall come again on the seventh day and make an inspection; if the disease has spread in the walls of the house,<sup>40</sup> the priest shall command that the stones in which the disease appears be taken out and thrown into an unclean place outside the city.<sup>41</sup> He shall have the inside of the house scraped thoroughly, and the plaster that is scraped off shall be dumped in an

unclean place outside the city.<sup>42</sup> They shall take other stones and put them in the place of those stones, and take other plaster and plaster the house.

<sup>43</sup>If the disease breaks out again in the house, after he has taken out the stones and scraped the house and plastered it,<sup>44</sup> the priest shall go and make inspection; if the disease has spread in the house, it is a spreading leprous<sup>b</sup> disease in the house; it is unclean.<sup>45</sup> He shall have the house torn down, its stones and timber and all the plaster of the house, and taken outside the city to an unclean place.<sup>46</sup> All who enter the house while it is shut up shall be unclean until the evening;<sup>47</sup> and all who sleep in the house shall wash their clothes; and all who eat in the house shall wash their clothes.

<sup>48</sup>If the priest comes and makes an inspection, and the disease has not spread in the house after the house was plastered, the priest shall pronounce the house clean; the disease is healed.<sup>49</sup> For the cleansing of the house he shall take two birds, with cedarwood and crimson yarn and hyssop,<sup>50</sup> and shall slaughter one of the birds over fresh water in an earthen vessel,<sup>51</sup> and shall take the cedarwood and the hyssop and the crimson yarn, along with the living bird, and dip them in the blood of the slaughtered bird and the fresh water, and sprinkle the house seven times.<sup>52</sup> Thus he shall cleanse the house with the blood of the bird, and with the fresh water, and with the living bird, and with the cedarwood and hyssop and crimson yarn;<sup>53</sup> and he shall let the living bird go out of the city into the open field; so he shall make atonement for the house, and it shall be clean.

<sup>a</sup> Gk Syr: Heb *afford*, <sup>31</sup> *such as he can afford, one*

<sup>b</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

**14.33–53: Surface affliction in houses.** **34:** *When you come into the land:* In the narrative, the Israelites are living in the wilderness camp; they therefore do not currently live in houses. *I put*, in non-Priestly texts, surface affliction is viewed as divine punishment (Num 12.10; Deut 28.27,35; 2 Sam 3.29; 2 Kings 5.26–27; 2 Chr 26.16–21); however, in the Priestly view, all natural occurrences ultimately stem from the deity's command. P thus attributes outbreaks of surface affliction to God even when they are not divine punishments. **35:** *The owner*, though it is potentially inconvenient and even a potentially significant financial loss (cf. vv. 43–45), the homeowner is expected to report possible surface affliction because of the threat of contamination and its effect on the entire community. **36:** The impurity caused by surface affliction will contaminate other objects and persons in the house (cf. vv. 46–47), but an allowance is made for removing objects before the priest officially diagnoses surface affliction. **40–41,45:** Disposal outside the city parallels the exclusion of surface-afflicted persons outside the camp (13.46). **46–47:** See

<sup>54</sup>This is the ritual for any leprous<sup>a</sup> disease: for an itch, <sup>55</sup>for leprous<sup>a</sup> diseases in clothing and houses, <sup>56</sup>and for a swelling or an eruption or a spot, <sup>57</sup>to determine when it is unclean and when it is clean. This is the ritual for leprous<sup>a</sup> diseases.

**15** The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: <sup>2</sup>Speak to the people of Israel and say to them:

When any man has a discharge from his member,<sup>b</sup> his discharge makes him ceremonially unclean. <sup>3</sup>The uncleanness of his discharge is this: whether his member<sup>b</sup> flows with his discharge, or his member<sup>b</sup> is stopped from discharging, it is uncleanness for him. <sup>4</sup>Every bed on which the one with the discharge lies shall be unclean; and everything on which he sits shall be unclean. <sup>5</sup>Anyone who touches his bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>6</sup>All who sit on anything on which the one with the discharge has sat shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>7</sup>All who touch the body of the one with the discharge shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>8</sup>If the one with the discharge spits on persons who are clean, then they shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>9</sup>Any saddle on which the one with the discharge rides shall be unclean. <sup>10</sup>All who touch anything that was under him shall be unclean until the evening, and all who carry such a thing shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>11</sup>All those whom the one with the

discharge touches without his having rinsed his hands in water shall wash their clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>12</sup>Any earthen vessel that the one with the discharge touches shall be broken; and every vessel of wood shall be rinsed in water.

<sup>13</sup>When the one with a discharge is cleansed of his discharge, he shall count seven days for his cleansing; he shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in fresh water, and he shall be clean. <sup>14</sup>On the eighth day he shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and come before the LORD to the entrance of the tent of meeting and give them to the priest. <sup>15</sup>The priest shall offer them, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on his behalf before the LORD for his discharge.

<sup>16</sup>If a man has an emission of semen, he shall bathe his whole body in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>17</sup>Everything made of cloth or of skin on which the semen falls shall be washed with water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>18</sup>If a man lies with a woman and has an emission of semen, both of them shall bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening.

<sup>19</sup>When a woman has a discharge of blood that is her regular discharge from her body, she shall be in her impurity for seven days, and whoever touches her shall be unclean until the evening. <sup>20</sup>Everything upon which

<sup>a</sup> A term for several skin diseases; precise meaning uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *flesh*

11.24–40n. 54–57: A typical Priestly conclusion formula for chs 13–14, though the items in the summary are ordered differently in the chapters. 15.1–33: **Sexual discharges.** This chapter outlines impurities caused by regular and irregular discharges from the genitals. As with other causes of contamination, sexual flows generate impurity because of the perceived loss of life that accompanies them. The chapter exhibits a chiasmic structure of impurity sources: **A:** Abnormal male discharge (vv. 2–15); **B:** Normal male discharge (seminal emission; vv. 16–17); **C:** Seminal discharge during sexual intercourse, affecting both men and women (v. 18); **B':** Normal female discharge (menstruation; vv. 19–24); **A':** Abnormal female discharge (vv. 25–30). None of these sexual discharges is considered sinful; rather, the contamination caused by them threatens the presence of the deity and thus requires careful measures for containment and purification (cf. 11.1–16.34n.). **3:** *Flows . . . stopped*, likely due to one of several infections of the urethra, including gonorrhoea. **4–12:** Impurity is contagious through physical contact with the impure person or objects contaminated by him. **13–15:** See 14.8–9n.; 14.10–20n. *Sin offering*, better, “purification offering.” **18:** Normal sexual relations cause impurity, yet according to the Priestly authors, God commands humans to “be fruitful and multiply” (e.g., Gen 1.28; 9.1,7). In P, sources of impurity are generally unrelated to sin. **19–24:** Menstrual impurity persists for seven days, presumably approximating the longest duration of regular menstruation.



she lies during her impurity shall be unclean; everything also upon which she sits shall be unclean. <sup>21</sup>Whoever touches her bed shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>22</sup>Whoever touches anything upon which she sits shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening; <sup>23</sup>whether it is the bed or anything upon which she sits, when he touches it he shall be unclean until the evening. <sup>24</sup>If any man lies with her, and her impurity falls on him, he shall be unclean seven days; and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean.

<sup>25</sup>If a woman has a discharge of blood for many days, not at the time of her impurity, or if she has a discharge beyond the time of her impurity, all the days of the discharge she shall continue in uncleanness; as in the days of her impurity, she shall be unclean. <sup>26</sup>Every bed on which she lies during all the days of her discharge shall be treated as the bed of her impurity; and everything on which she sits shall be unclean, as in the uncleanness of her impurity. <sup>27</sup>Whoever touches these

things shall be unclean, and shall wash his clothes, and bathe in water, and be unclean until the evening. <sup>28</sup>If she is cleansed of her discharge, she shall count seven days, and after that she shall be clean. <sup>29</sup>On the eighth day she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons and bring them to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting. <sup>30</sup>The priest shall offer one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering; and the priest shall make atonement on her behalf before the LORD for her unclean discharge.

<sup>31</sup>Thus you shall keep the people of Israel separate from their uncleanness, so that they do not die in their uncleanness by defiling my tabernacle that is in their midst.

<sup>32</sup>This is the ritual for those who have a discharge: for him who has an emission of semen, becoming unclean thereby, <sup>33</sup>for her who is in the infirmity of her period, for anyone, male or female, who has a discharge, and for the man who lies with a woman who is unclean.

**16** The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when

The strength of the impurity communicated by the menstruant is related to the intensity of contact with her (cf. 11.24–40n.). No rules for purification are given; presumably the woman bathes and launders on the seventh day, and waits until evening (2 Sam 11.2.4; cf. Num 19.19). The requirement to bathe in a ritual bath (Heb “mikveh”) is a later institution. Although many such structures have been uncovered in late Second Temple period sites, none has been uncovered from earlier periods. **24:** *If any man lies with her, and her impurity falls on him*, better, “If any man lies with her, with the result that her impurity falls on him.” Although it communicates impurity, intercourse with a menstruant is permitted by P (contrast 18.19 and 20.18, which are H). **25–30:** Irregular female blood flow, like irregular male discharge, produces impurity until the flow stops and requires a seven-day waiting period and sacrificial blood for sanctuary purification (cf. vv. 13–15). **31:** The rationale for proper disposal of impurity: impurity is attracted to the sanctuary, where it will accumulate and threaten the divine presence (cf. 4.1–6.7n.; 11.1–16.34n.). **32–33:** A typical Priestly summary postscript (cf. 7.37–38; 11.46–47; 13.59; 14.54–57). **32:** *Ritual*, see 6.9n.

**16.1–34: The day of purgations.** This chapter describes the annual purification of the entire tabernacle complex, including the purgation of the inner sanctum of the deity, the holy of holies. According to v. 29, this occurs on the tenth day of the seventh month, which in 23.26–32; 25.9 is called “the day of purgations” (Heb “yom hakippurim”), and in later Judaism “Yom Kippur” (often mistranslated as the Day of Atonement). Though the sanctuary complex is regularly purged by the blood of purification offerings, further purification ensures thorough cleansing. Moreover, routine purification does not purge the contamination of intentional sins, which penetrates all the way into the holy of holies and is therefore especially offensive to the deity (cf. 4.1–35n.). This system creates the remarkable circumstance that the holy of holies, purged only once each year, could become the most polluted area in the tabernacle complex. This potential flaw in the Priestly system of purification reveals the fundamental optimism of its authors: in their view, once Israel knows the commandments of God, they will carefully obey them. Intentional sin is expected to be a rare occurrence; unintentional sin and impurities, by contrast, are unavoidable and thus greater concerns. **1:** *After the death of the two sons of Aaron:* Some interpreters have argued that ch 16 originally followed ch 10 and that its purification ritual was intended to purge the tabernacle of corpse contamination after the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, and after other emergencies, rather than once a year on Yom Kippur. Alternatively, this reference simply situates ch 16 in the chronology of



they drew near before the LORD and died.

<sup>2</sup>The LORD said to Moses:

Tell your brother Aaron not to come just at any time into the sanctuary inside the curtain before the mercy seat<sup>a</sup> that is upon the ark, or he will die; for I appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat.<sup>a</sup> <sup>3</sup>Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. <sup>4</sup>He shall put on the holy linen tunic, and shall have the linen undergarments next to his body, fasten the linen sash, and wear the linen turban; these are the holy vestments. He shall bathe his body in water, and then put them on. <sup>5</sup>He shall take from the congregation of the people of Israel two male goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering.

<sup>6</sup>Aaron shall offer the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house. <sup>7</sup>He shall take the two goats and set them before the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting; <sup>8</sup>and Aaron shall cast lots on the two goats, one lot for the LORD and the other lot for Azazel.<sup>b</sup> <sup>9</sup>Aaron shall present the goat on which the lot fell for the LORD, and offer it as a sin offering; <sup>10</sup>but the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel<sup>b</sup> shall be presented alive before the LORD to make atonement over it, that it may be sent away into the wilderness to Azazel.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself, and shall make atonement for himself and for his house; he shall slaughter the bull as a sin offering for himself. <sup>12</sup>He shall take a censer full of coals of fire from the altar before the LORD, and two handfuls of crushed sweet incense, and he shall bring it inside

the curtain <sup>13</sup>and put the incense on the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the mercy seat<sup>a</sup> that is upon the covenant,<sup>c</sup> or he will die. <sup>14</sup>He shall take some of the blood of the bull, and sprinkle it with his finger on the front of the mercy seat,<sup>a</sup> and before the mercy seat<sup>a</sup> he shall sprinkle the blood with his finger seven times.

<sup>15</sup>He shall slaughter the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring its blood inside the curtain, and do with its blood as he did with the blood of the bull, sprinkling it upon the mercy seat<sup>a</sup> and before the mercy seat.<sup>a</sup> <sup>16</sup>Thus he shall make atonement for the sanctuary, because of the uncleannesses of the people of Israel, and because of their transgressions, all their sins; and so he shall do for the tent of meeting, which remains with them in the midst of their uncleannesses. <sup>17</sup>No one shall be in the tent of meeting from the time he enters to make atonement in the sanctuary until he comes out and has made atonement for himself and for his house and for all the assembly of Israel. <sup>18</sup>Then he shall go out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement on its behalf, and shall take some of the blood of the bull and of the blood of the goat, and put it on each of the horns of the altar. <sup>19</sup>He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times, and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleannesses of the people of Israel.

<sup>a</sup> Or *the cover*

<sup>b</sup> Traditionally rendered *a scapegoat*

<sup>c</sup> Or *treaty*, or *testament*; Heb *eduth*

the overall narrative, perhaps indicating that chs 11–15 were not actually narrated immediately after the events of ch 10 (cf. 16.34b n.). 2: *Mercy seat*, the cover of the ark upon which the cherubim are set (cf. Ex 25.17–22). 3: See 4.3. *Sin offering*, better, “purification offering”; see. 4.1–35n. 4: See 8.6–9. 6–22: Aaron applies the sacrificial blood to the sanctuary and its furnishings, effecting their purification. In later Judaism, after the Temple is destroyed, the focus of Yom Kippur shifts to the repentance and forgiveness of individuals, a minor element in this chapter (see v. 30). 7: *Tent of meeting*, see 1.1n. 8: *Azazel*, probably, “angry” or “fierce god,” a demonic figure (cf. 17.7), in contrast to the Israelite deity. Rabbinic interpreters understood *Azazel* as “the goat that goes away,” i.e., “the scapegoat.” 13: When he enters the holy of holies, Aaron must burn incense to conceal the deity from his sight (cf. v. 2). 15: The blood of the first goat serves as a detergent to release any sins that have accumulated in the holy of holies. This procedure then allows Aaron to load those sins onto the other goat (v. 21). 16: The beginning of the verse is better translated, “He shall purify the sanctuary from the Israelites’ impurities and, of all their sins, from their rebellious acts.” Impurity and intentional sins are hereby both purged from the inner sanctum. *And so he shall do for the tent of meeting*, referring to the cleansing of the outer room of the tabernacle (cf. 4.5–7,16–18; Ex 30.10). *Remains*, better, “dwells.” 18–19: Working out from the inner and outer rooms of the

<sup>20</sup> When he has finished atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. <sup>21</sup> Then Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins, putting them on the head of the goat, and sending it away into the wilderness by means of someone designated for the task.<sup>a</sup> <sup>22</sup> The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a barren region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.

<sup>23</sup> Then Aaron shall enter the tent of meeting, and shall take off the linen vestments that he put on when he went into the holy place, and shall leave them there. <sup>24</sup> He shall bathe his body in water in a holy place, and put on his vestments; then he shall come out and offer his burnt offering and the burnt offering of the people, making atonement for himself and for the people. <sup>25</sup> The fat of the sin offering he shall turn into smoke on the altar. <sup>26</sup> The one who sets the goat free for Azazel<sup>b</sup> shall wash his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward may come into the camp. <sup>27</sup> The bull of the sin offering and the goat of the sin offering, whose blood was brought in to make atonement in the holy place, shall be taken outside the camp; their skin and their flesh and their dung shall be consumed in fire. <sup>28</sup> The one who burns them shall wash

his clothes and bathe his body in water, and afterward may come into the camp.

<sup>29</sup> This shall be a statute to you forever: In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall deny yourselves,<sup>c</sup> and shall do no work, neither the citizen nor the alien who resides among you. <sup>30</sup> For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins you shall be clean before the LORD. <sup>31</sup> It is a sabbath of complete rest to you, and you shall deny yourselves;<sup>c</sup> it is a statute forever. <sup>32</sup> The priest who is anointed and consecrated as priest in his father's place shall make atonement, wearing the linen vestments, the holy vestments. <sup>33</sup> He shall make atonement for the sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. <sup>34</sup> This shall be an everlasting statute to you, to make atonement for the people of Israel once in the year for all their sins. And Moses did as the LORD had commanded him.

**17** The LORD spoke to Moses:  
<sup>2</sup> Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the people of Israel and say to them: This is

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Traditionally rendered a *scapegoat*

<sup>c</sup> Or *shall fast*

tabernacle, Aaron is to purify the altar of burnt offerings in the courtyard. **21–22:** The second goat carries away the intentional sins released from the sanctuary through the application of blood. Aaron loads these sins onto the goat by reciting them while placing *both his hands* on its head (contrast 1.4). *Wilderness*, a region viewed in the ancient Near East as the domain of demons. **29–34a:** An H addition to vv. 1–28, 34b, which are P. H expands the ritual to include fasting and work cessation and thereby provides the laity a role in the day of purgations. **31:** *Sabbath of complete rest*, emphasizing the requirement for a complete cessation of work. This term is also applied to the sabbath day (Ex 31.15; 35.2; Lev 23.3,32) and to the sabbath year (Lev 25.4). **34b:** Moses delivers the divine commands to Aaron (cf. v. 2), but Aaron does not perform them immediately because the day of purgations is six months away (see Introduction).

**17.1–26.46: The Holiness Collection.** Most scholars agree that chs 17–26 (H) comprise a compositional stratum in the book of Leviticus separate from chs 1–16 (P). Chs 17–26 are especially concerned with holiness and extend the potential for holiness beyond the priests to the Israelite laity. For this reason, chs 17–26 are titled the Holiness Collection, abbreviated as H (see Introduction). Many scholars call this unit the Holiness Code, but like other ancient Near Eastern law collections, it is not a code: it has redundancies and contradictions (e.g., doubled laws in chs 18 and 20), is not organized for use by judges, and is not complete. Though previously believed to be older than chs 1–16, it is now clear that chs 17–26, as well as ch 27, are later additions to the preceding chapters meant to revise and supplement them. It is likely that H supplements P in part by borrowing and revising non-Priestly laws from the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy.

**17.1–16: Slaughter.** In light of the sacrificial laws in chs 1–7, H here provides a new set of regulations concerning eating meat. Most notably, H requires that the Israelites present as offerings at the sanctuary

what the LORD has commanded. <sup>3</sup> If anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or slaughters it outside the camp, <sup>4</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering to the LORD before the tabernacle of the LORD, he shall be held guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood, and he shall be cut off from the people. <sup>5</sup> This is in order that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and offer them as sacrifices of well-being to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> The priest shall dash the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and turn the fat into smoke as a pleasing odor to the LORD, <sup>7</sup> so that they may no longer offer their sacrifices for goat-demons, to whom they prostitute themselves. This shall be a statute forever to them throughout their generations.

<sup>8</sup> And say to them further: Anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice, <sup>9</sup> and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, to sacrifice it to the LORD, shall be cut off from the people.

<sup>10</sup> If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people. <sup>11</sup> For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I have said to the people of Israel: No person among you shall eat blood, nor shall any alien who resides among you eat blood. <sup>13</sup> And anyone of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside among them, who hunts down an animal or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.

<sup>14</sup> For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off. <sup>15</sup> All persons, citizens or aliens, who eat what dies of itself or what has been torn by wild animals, shall wash their clothes, and bathe themselves in water, and be unclean until the evening; then they shall be clean. <sup>16</sup> But if they do not wash themselves or bathe their body, they shall bear their guilt.

all sacrificeable animals that are slaughtered (vv. 3–7). This command supplements the P rules in Gen 9.3–4, which permit nonsacrificial slaughter of animals for meat, provided that no blood is consumed. Having now received the sacrificial laws, Israel is obligated to treat every slaughter of a domesticated animal as a sacrifice. The Priestly source thus divides culinary history into three epochs: (1) Creation to Flood (vegetarianism, Gen 1.29–31); (2) Post-Flood to Sinai (nonsacrificial slaughter, Gen 9.3–4); (3) After Sinai (sacrificial slaughter of all domesticated animals, Lev 1–7; 17.3–7). Lev 17 contrasts markedly with Deut 12.15–27, which expressly permit profane slaughter of sacrificeable animals. 3–4: All slaughtered sacrificeable animals must be presented as offerings. In the Priestly system, such sacrifices, intended to provide meat for eating, are well-being offerings (cf. 3.1–17; 7.11–34). Within its wilderness setting, H envisions a single sanctuary, making adherence to this command possible. 4: Nonsacrificial slaughter is tantamount to murder (cf. 1.4; 17.11), a view that enforces sanctuary slaughter. 5,7: With the introduction of sacrifice, what was once nonsacrificial slaughter is perceived as sacrificial. Any slaughter of sacrificeable animals outside of the sanctuary is viewed as sacrifice to other deities or to demons. Prostitution is a frequent metaphor for worshipping other gods. *Goat demons*, cf. 16.8n.; 2 Chr 11.15; Isa 13.21; 34.14. 8–9: Foreigners residing among the Israelites presumably may slaughter domesticated animals nonsacrificially, but neither Israelites nor foreigners may offer sacrifices to any deity but the LORD. 10–14: Consumption of blood from both wild and domesticated animals is prohibited (cf. Gen 9.4; Lev 3.17; Deut 12.23–25). Once the blood is drained, the meat may be eaten. 11: *For making atonement for your lives*, better, “as a ransom for your lives.” According to H, sacrificial blood not only purifies the altar but also ransoms (Heb “kipper”) the offerer who shed the animal’s blood (cf. 1.4; 17.4). Compare the payment of a ransom in Ex 30.11–16 and Num 31.48–50 to appease divine wrath. 15–16: Laypersons (but not priests; cf. 22.8) may eat an animal that died naturally or was killed by other animals, but they must purify afterwards (cf. 11.40; contrast Ex 22.31; Deut 14.21). Later Judaism prohibits such eating, following Deut 14.21.

**18** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the LORD your God. <sup>3</sup> You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. <sup>4</sup> My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the LORD your God. <sup>5</sup> You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live: I am the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover nakedness: I am the LORD. <sup>7</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. <sup>8</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is the nakedness of your father. <sup>9</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether born at home or born abroad. <sup>10</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. <sup>11</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, begotten by your father, since she is your sister. <sup>12</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's flesh. <sup>13</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's flesh. <sup>14</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's

brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. <sup>15</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law: she is your son's wife; you shall not uncover her nakedness. <sup>16</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. <sup>17</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, and you shall not take<sup>a</sup> her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are your<sup>b</sup> flesh; it is depravity. <sup>18</sup> And you shall not take<sup>a</sup> a woman as a rival to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

<sup>19</sup> You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. <sup>20</sup> You shall not have sexual relations with your kinsman's wife, and defile yourself with her. <sup>21</sup> You shall not give any of your offspring to sacrifice them<sup>c</sup> to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. <sup>22</sup> You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. <sup>23</sup> You shall not have sexual relations with any animal and defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman give herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it: it is perversion.

<sup>24</sup> Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations I am casting out before you have defiled

<sup>a</sup> Or *marry*

<sup>b</sup> Gk: Heb lacks *your*

<sup>c</sup> Heb to *pass them over*

**18.1–30: Foreign abominations.** The prohibitions in this chapter are primarily sexual in nature, though child sacrifice to Molech is also included. These sins are associated with foreigners and especially the Canaanites, whom God will remove from their land so that Israel may dwell in it. There is no evidence that the Canaanites actually engaged in these practices. **1–5:** A general prohibition against following the statutes of the Egyptians and Canaanites, and adjuration instead to obey the LORD's commands, which follow in vv. 6–23. **2.4:** *I am the LORD your God*, a characteristic H expression, underscoring that because the Israelites belong to the LORD, they must be holy, namely, distinct from other nations and follow the rules of their god alone. **6–20, 22–23:** Sexual prohibitions, with special focus on various forms of incest. **20.10–21** prescribes the punishments for sexual sins; cf. Deut 27.20–23. **6: Uncover nakedness:** nakedness is a euphemism for the genitals, and the entire phrase refers to intercourse. **17: Depravity,** a term of opprobrium employed by H for sexual sins. **19:** Contrast 15.24, which allows intercourse with a menstruant. **20: Defile yourself,** referring to moral impurity, which is prohibited by H. Ritual impurity, by contrast, is permitted (cf. 15.18n.). **21: Molech,** a Canaanite deity associated with child sacrifice; see 20.2–5; 2 Kings 23.10; Jer 32.35. **Profane the name,** to deny the Israelite God the honor and fame due him or to dishonor him directly. It also seems to connote diminishing the deity's holiness. **22:** Among the biblical legal corpora, only H contains a prohibition against same-sex intercourse. The prohibition may be due to its nonreproductive nature. **24–30:** God avenged the land for the defilement caused by its inhabitants, whom the land in turn expelled. Such will be the fate of the Israelites if they too commit the sins prohibited in vv. 6–23.

themselves.<sup>25</sup> Thus the land became defiled; and I punished it for its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.<sup>26</sup> But you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations, either the citizen or the alien who resides among you<sup>27</sup> (for the inhabitants of the land, who were before you, committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled);<sup>28</sup> otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you.<sup>29</sup> For whoever commits any of these abominations shall be cut off from their people.<sup>30</sup> So keep my charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the LORD your God.

**19** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying:  
<sup>2</sup> Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.<sup>3</sup> You shall each revere your mother and father, and you shall keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.<sup>4</sup> Do not turn to idols or make cast images for yourselves: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>5</sup> When you offer a sacrifice of well-being to the LORD, offer it in such a way that it is acceptable in your behalf.<sup>6</sup> It shall be eaten on the same day you offer it, or on the next day; and anything left over until the third day shall be consumed in fire.<sup>7</sup> If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination; it will not be acceptable.<sup>8</sup> All who eat it shall be subject to punishment, because

they have profaned what is holy to the LORD; and any such person shall be cut off from the people.

<sup>9</sup> When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest.<sup>10</sup> You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>11</sup> You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another.<sup>12</sup> And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning.<sup>14</sup> You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>15</sup> You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor.<sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer<sup>a</sup> among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood<sup>b</sup> of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself.<sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against

<sup>a</sup> Meaning of Heb uncertain

<sup>b</sup> Heb *stand against the blood*

Punishment for prohibited moral impurity is often exile or other destruction (Isa 64.4–11; Ezek 20.38; 22.2–16; 39.23–24; cf. Lev 26.33–39). **25:** For crimes and sins polluting the land, see Num 35.33–34; Isa 24.5–7; Ezek 22.24; Ezra 9.11. **29:** *Cut off*, see 7.19–21n.

**19.1–37: Holiness of Israelite laypersons.** This chapter is a miscellany of ethical and ritual laws introduced by the command for all Israelites to be holy (v. 2), an imperative fulfilled through careful observance of all the statutes presented by the Priestly authors. **2:** Lay holiness expresses the separateness of Israel from the other peoples (cf. vv. 36–37; 25.38,55): Israelites worship the LORD and express their fidelity through obedience to the LORD's commands (cf. 11.44–45; 20.7–8,24–26; Num 15.40–41). Cf. Ex 19.6; Deut 14.2,21; 26.19; 28.6. **3–4,11–13:** These verses correspond closely with the Decalogue (cf. Ex 20.2–17; Deut 5.6–21). **5–8:** Cf. 7.15–18. The grammatical formulation here differs in part from 7.15–18 (here, genuine second-person plural construction; in ch 7, third-person singular). 7.15–18 is addressed to the priests alone (6.24) while this chapter is addressed to the Israelite laity (v. 2). V. 8 also clarifies the nature of the penalty for one who eats the well-being offering on the third day: as in the case of consuming the sacrifice in an impure state, eating on the third day leads to complete destruction of the offender's lineage (cf. 7.19–21). **9–10:** Cf. Ex 23.10–11; Lev 23.22; 25.2–7; Deut 24.19–22; Ruth 2.1–10. **15:** Cf. Ex 23.2–3; Deut 1.17; 16.18–20. **17–18:** For attitudes and actions toward foreigners, see 17.8–9; 19.33–34; 25.39–46. **18b:** This verse, along with Deut 6.5, is quoted in Mt 22.37–40 (cf. Mk 12.28–33; Lk 10.27;



any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

<sup>19</sup> You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your animals breed with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; nor shall you put on a garment made of two different materials.

<sup>20</sup> If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, designated for another man but not ransomed or given her freedom, an inquiry shall be held. They shall not be put to death, since she has not been freed; <sup>21</sup> but he shall bring a guilt offering for himself to the LORD, at the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram as guilt offering. <sup>22</sup> And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he committed; and the sin he committed shall be forgiven him.

<sup>23</sup> When you come into the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall regard their fruit as forbidden;<sup>a</sup> three years it shall be forbidden<sup>b</sup> to you, it must not be eaten. <sup>24</sup> In the fourth year all their fruit shall be set apart for rejoicing in the LORD. <sup>25</sup> But in the fifth year you may eat of their fruit, that their yield may be increased for you: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>26</sup> You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice augury or witchcraft.

<sup>27</sup> You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. <sup>28</sup> You shall not make any gashes in your flesh for the dead or tattoo any marks upon you: I am the LORD.

<sup>29</sup> Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, that the land not become

prostituted and full of depravity. <sup>30</sup> You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

<sup>31</sup> Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>32</sup> You shall rise before the aged, and defer to the old; and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. <sup>34</sup> The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>35</sup> You shall not cheat in measuring length, weight, or quantity. <sup>36</sup> You shall have honest balances, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

<sup>37</sup> You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them: I am the LORD.

**20** The LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> Say further to the people of Israel:

Any of the people of Israel, or of the aliens who reside in Israel, who give any of their offspring to Molech shall be put to death; the people of the land shall stone them to death.

<sup>3</sup> I myself will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people, because they have given of their offspring to Molech, defiling my sanctuary and profaning my holy name. <sup>4</sup> And if the people of the land should

<sup>a</sup> Heb as their uncircumcision

<sup>b</sup> Heb uncircumcision

Rom 13.9; Gal 5.14). The neighbor here is a fellow Israelite (cf. vv. 17,34). **19:** One reason mixtures are prohibited is to remind the people to keep themselves distinct, i.e., holy (cf. Deut 22.9–11). The mixture of wool and linen is reserved for the priestly vestments (Ex 28.6; 39.29) and possibly for fringes to be worn by lay Israelites (Num 15.37–41). **20–22:** Contrast the case of the free, betrothed woman in 20.10; cf. Ex 22.16–17; Deut 22.23–27. **23:** *You shall regard its fruit as forbidden*, lit., “You shall treat as foreskin its foreskin with its fruit.” The metaphor of circumcision is applied to fruit, with the likely meaning that in the first *three years*, the bud (i.e., the foreskin) is to be plucked with the fruit still inside. *Forbidden*, lit., “uncircumcised.” **25:** Cf. *Laws of Hammurabi* §60, which suggests a five-year maturation for date orchards. **26:** *Blood*, cf. 3.17n.; 17.10–14n. For prohibitions against various forms of divination, see also v. 31; Ex 22.18; Deut 18.9–14. **27–28:** Cf. 21.5n. **29:** Combination of literal and metaphorical meanings of prostitution. **34:** Cf. v. 18; Ex 22.21; Deut 10.19; 24.17–18. **35–36:** Cf. Deut 25.13–16; Am 8.5; Mic 6.11. *Ephah*, a dry measure equivalent to ca. 21 qts (23 L); *hin*, a liquid measure equivalent to ca. 1 gal (3.8 L).

**20.1–27:** Various prohibitions. Some of the laws in chs 18–19 are repeated here, although many are in a different legal form: some of the absolute prohibitions (apodictic laws) of ch 18 are here formulated as legal cases (casuistic laws) with stated penalties. Other laws are also added. The significant overlap between the two chapters suggests that they are independent reflections of a common tradition subsequently compiled by H. **2:** *Molech*,



ever close their eyes to them, when they give of their offspring to Molech, and do not put them to death, <sup>5</sup> I myself will set my face against them and against their family, and will cut them off from among their people, them and all who follow them in prostituting themselves to Molech.

<sup>6</sup> If any turn to mediums and wizards, prostituting themselves to them, I will set my face against them, and will cut them off from the people. <sup>7</sup> Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am the LORD your God. <sup>8</sup> Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the LORD; I sanctify you. <sup>9</sup> All who curse father or mother shall be put to death; having cursed father or mother, their blood is upon them.

<sup>10</sup> If a man commits adultery with the wife of <sup>a</sup> his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall be put to death. <sup>11</sup> The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. <sup>12</sup> If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall be put to death; they have committed perversion, their blood is upon them. <sup>13</sup> If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them. <sup>14</sup> If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity; they shall be burned to death, both he and they, that there may be no depravity among you. <sup>15</sup> If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he shall be put to death; and you shall kill the animal. <sup>16</sup> If a woman approaches any animal and has sexual relations with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal; they shall be put to death, their blood is upon them.

<sup>17</sup> If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has

uncovered his sister's nakedness, he shall be subject to punishment. <sup>18</sup> If a man lies with a woman having her sickness and uncovers her nakedness, he has laid bare her flow and she has laid bare her flow of blood; both of them shall be cut off from their people. <sup>19</sup> You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to lay bare one's own flesh; they shall be subject to punishment. <sup>20</sup> If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall be subject to punishment; they shall die childless. <sup>21</sup> If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.

<sup>22</sup> You shall keep all my statutes and all my ordinances, and observe them, so that the land to which I bring you to settle in may not vomit you out. <sup>23</sup> You shall not follow the practices of the nation that I am driving out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. <sup>24</sup> But I have said to you: You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the LORD your God; I have separated you from the peoples. <sup>25</sup> You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. <sup>26</sup> You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine.

<sup>27</sup> A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned to death, their blood is upon them.

<sup>a</sup> Heb repeats *if a man commits adultery with the wife of*

see 18.21n. 5: *Cut them off*, see 7.19–21n. 5–6: *Prostituting*, cf. 17.5,7n. 6: See v. 27; 19.26n. 7–8: *Consecrate yourselves*, i.e., separate from foreign worship practices by following the LORD's commands (cf. vv. 24–26). 9: Cf. Ex 21.17. 10–21: Cf. 18.6–20,22–23. 18: *Sickness*, i.e., her menstrual period (cf. 15.33). Contrast 15.24. 20–21: *Die childless*, perhaps a variant of the “cut off” formula (cf. 7.19–21n.). 22–26: A concluding exhortation similar to 18.24–30; cf. 20.7–8n. 24: *Milk and honey*, a typical biblical description of the land of Canaan (e.g., Ex 3.8; Deut 6.3). 26: This verse makes clear that *holy* means “separated” for God. 27: Because it follows the concluding paragraph, this verse is likely a later insertion; cf. v. 6; 19.31.