THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

REVISED EDITION

1

Genesis ~ Leviticus

Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland
General Editors

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

THE EXPOSITOR'S BIBLE COMMENTARY

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PREFACE

Frank Gaebelein wrote the following in the preface to the original Expositor's Bible Commentary (which first appeared in 1979): "The title of this work defines its purpose. Written primarily by expositors for expositors, it aims to provide preachers, teachers, and students of the Bible with a new and comprehensive commentary on the books of the Old and New Testaments." Those volumes achieved that purpose admirably. The original EBC was exceptionally well received and had an enormous impact on the life of the church. It has served as the mainstay of countless pastors and students who could not afford an extensive library on each book of the Bible but who wanted solid guidance from scholars committed to the authority of the Holy Scriptures.

Gaebelein also wrote, "A commentary that will continue to be useful through the years should handle contemporary trends in biblical studies in such a way as to avoid becoming outdated when critical fashions change." This revision continues the EBC's exalted purpose and stands on the shoulders of the expositors of the first edition, but it seeks to maintain the usefulness of the commentary by interacting with new discoveries and academic discussions. While the primary goal of this commentary is to elucidate the text and not to provide a guide to the scholarly literature about the text, the commentators critically engage recent academic discussion and provide updated bibliographies so that pastors, teachers, and students can keep abreast of modern scholarship.

Some of the commentaries in the EBC have been revised by the original author or in conjunction with a younger colleague. In other cases, scholars have been commissioned to offer fresh commentaries because the original author had passed on or wanted to pass on the baton to the next generation of evangelical scholars. Today, with commentaries on a single book of the Old and New Testaments often extending into multiple volumes, the need for a comprehensive yet succinct commentary that guides one to the gist of the text's meaning is even more pressing. The new EBC seeks to fill this need.

The theological stance of this commentary series remains unchanged: the authors are committed to the divine inspiration, complete trustworthiness, and

full authority of the Bible. The commentators have demonstrated proficiency in the biblical book that is their specialty, as well as commitment to the church and the pastoral dimension of biblical interpretation. They also represent the geographical and confessional diversity that characterized the first contributors.

The commentaries adhere to the same chief principle of grammatico-historical interpretation that drove the first edition. In the foreword to the inaugural issue of the journal *New Testament Studies* in 1954, Matthew Black warned that "the danger in the present is that theology, with its head too high in the clouds, may end by falling into the pit of an unhistorical and uncritical dogmatism. Into any new theological undertaking must be brought all that was best in the old ideal of sound learning, scrupulous attention to philology, text and history." The dangers that Black warned against over fifty years ago have not vanished. Indeed, new dangers arise in a secular, consumerist culture that finds it more acceptable to use God's name in exclamations than in prayer and that encourages insipid theologies that hang in the wind and shift to tickle the ears and to meet the latest fancy. Only a solid biblical foundation can fend off these fads.

The Bible was not written for our information but for our transformation. It is not a quarry to find stones with which to batter others but to find the rock on which to build the church. It does not invite us simply to speak of God but to hear God and to confess that his Son, Jesus Christ, is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Php 2:11). It also calls us to obey his commandments (Mt 28:20). It is not a self-interpreting text, however. Interpretation of the Holy Scriptures requires sound learning and regard for history, language, and text. Exegetes must interpret not only the primary documents but all that has a bearing, direct or indirect, on the grammar and syntax, historical context, transmission, and translation of these writings.

The translation used in this commentary remains the New International Version (North American edition), but all of the commentators work from the original languages (Hebrew and Greek) and draw on other translations when deemed useful. The format is also very similar to the original EBC, while the design is extensively updated with a view to enhanced ease of use for the reader. Each commentary section begins with an introduction (printed in a single-column format) that provides the reader with the background necessary to understand the Bible book. Almost all introductions include a short bibliography and an outline. The Bible text is divided into primary units that are often

explained in an “Overview” section that precedes commentary on specific verses. The complete text of the New International Version is provided for quick reference, and an extensive “Commentary” section (printed in a double-column format) follows the reproducing of the text. When the Hebrew or Greek text is cited in the commentary section, a phonetic system of transliteration and translation is used. The “Notes” section (printed in a single-column format) provides a specialized discussion of key words or concepts, as well as helpful resource information. The original languages and their transliterations will appear in this section. Finally, on occasion, expanded thoughts can be found in a “Reflections” section (printed in a double-column format) that follows the Notes section.

One additional feature is worth mentioning. Throughout this volume, wherever specific biblical words are discussed, the Goodrick-Kohlenberger (GK) numbers have been added. These numbers, which appear in the *Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* and other reference tools, are based on the numbering system developed by Edward Goodrick and John Kohlenberger III and provide a system similar but superior to the Strong’s numbering system.

The editors wish to thank all of the contributors for their hard work and commitment to this project. We also deeply appreciate the labor and skill of the staff at Zondervan. It is a joy to work with them — in particular Jack Kuhatschek, Stan Gundry, Katya Covrett, Dirk Buursma, and Verlyn Verbrugge. In addition, we acknowledge with thanks the work of Connie Gundry Tappy as copy editor.

We all fervently desire that these commentaries will result not only in a deeper intellectual grasp of the Word of God but also in hearts that more profoundly love and obey the God who reveals himself to us in its pages.

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William M. Hinson professor of Christian Scriptures, George W. Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University

Tremper Longman III, Robert H. Gundry professor of biblical studies,Westmont College

ABBREVIATIONS

Bible Texts,Versions, Etc.

ASV	American Standard Version
AT	The Complete Bible: An American Translation (NT: E. J. Goodspeed)
Barclay	The New Testament, A New Translation
Beck	New Testament in Language of Today
BHS	Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia
CEV	Contemporary English Version
CSB	Chris tian Standard Bible
ESV	English Standard Version
GNB	Good News Bible (see also TEV)
GWT	God's Word Translation
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
Knox	Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate
LXX	Septuagint (the Greek OT)
MLB	Modern Language Bible
Moffatt	A New Translation of the Bible, James Moffatt
Montgomery	Centenary Translation of the New Testament in Modern English
MT	Masoretic Text of the OT
NA27	Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland, 27th ed.
NAB	New American Bible
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCV	New Century Version
NEB	New English Bible
NET	New English Translation (www.netbible.com)
NIV	New International Version

NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NKJV	New King James Version
NLT	New Living Translation
Norlie	New Testament in Modern English
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
Phillips	New Testament in Modern English, J. B. Phillips
REB	Revised English Bible
Rieu	Penguin Bible
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version
Samar.	Samaritan Pentateuch
TCNT	Twentieth Century New Testament
TEV	Today's English Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version
UBS4	The Greek New Testament, United Bible Societies, 4th ed.
Vul.	Vulgate
Weymouth	New Testament in Modern Speech, R. F. Weymouth
Williams	The New Testament in the Language of the People, C. B. Williams

Old Testament, New Testament, Apocrypha

Ge	Genesis
Ex	Exodus
Lev	Leviticus
Nu	Numbers
Dt	Deuteronomy
Jos	Joshua
Jdg	Judges
Ru	Ruth
1 – 2Sa	1 – 2 Sam uel

1 – 2 Kgdms	1 – 2 Kingdoms (LXX)
1 – 2Ki	1 – 2 Kings
3 – 4 Kgdms	3 – 4 Kingdoms (LXX)
1 – 2Ch	1 – 2 Chron icles
Ezr	Ezra
Ne	Nehemiah
Est	Esther
Job	Job
Ps/Pss	Psalm/Psalms
Pr	Proverbs
Ecc	Ecclesiastes
SS	Song of Songs
Isa	Isaiah
Jer	Jeremiah
La	Lamentations
Eze	Ezekiel
Da	Daniel
Hos	Hosea
Joel	Joel
Am	Amos
Ob	Obadiah
Jnh	Jonah
Mic	Micah
Na	Nahum
Hab	Habakkuk
Zep	Zephaniah
Hag	Haggai
Zec	Zechariah
Mal	Malachi
Mt	Matthew
Mk	Mark
Lk	Luke
Jn	John

Ac	Acts
Ro	Romans
1 – 2Co	1 – 2 Co rin thi ans
Gal	Galatians
Eph	Ephesians
Php	Philippians
Col	Colossians
1 – 2Th	1 – 2 Thes salo nians
1 – 2Ti	1 – 2 Tim othy
Tit	Titus
Phm	Philemon
Heb	Hebrews
Jas	James
1 – 2Pe	1 – 2 Peter
1 – 2 – 3Jn	1 – 2 – 3 John
Jude	Jude
Rev	Revelation
Add Esth	Additions to Esther
Add Dan	Additions to Daniel
Bar	Baruch
Bel	Bel and the Dragon
Ep Jer	Epistle of Jeremiah
1 – 2 Esd	1 – 2 Esdras
1 – 2 Macc	1 – 2 Maccabees
3 – 4 Macc	3 – 4 Maccabees
Jdt	Judith
Pr Azar	Prayer of Azariah
Pr Man	Prayer of Manasseh
Ps 151	Psalm 151
Sir	Sirach/Ecclesiasticus
Sus	Susanna
Tob	Tobit
Wis	Wisdom of Solomon

Dead Sea Scrolls and Related Texts

CD	Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document
1QapGen	Genesis Apocryphon (texts from Qumran)
1QH	Hôdãymõt or Thanksgiving Hymns (texts from Qumran)
1QIsa	Isaiah (texts from Qumran)
1QM	Milhãmãah or War Scroll (texts from Qumran)
1QpHab	Pesher Habakkuk (texts from Qumran)
1QS	Serek hayyah.ad or Rule of the Community (texts from Qumran)
1QSa	Rule of the Congregation (texts from Qumran)
1QpMic	Pesher Micah (text from Qumran)
4QpNa	Pesher Nahum (texts from Qumran)
4QpPs	Pesher Psalms (texts from Qumran)
4Q44 (4QDtq)	Deuteronomy (texts from Qumran)
4Q174	Florilegium (texts from Qumran)
4Q252	Commentary on Genesis A, formerly Patriarchal Blessings (texts from Qumran)
4Q394	Miqsat Macséa ha-Toraha (texts from Qumran)
4Q400	Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (texts from Qumran)
4Q502	Ritual of Marriage (texts from Qumran)
4Q521	Messianic Apocalypse (texts from Qumran)
4Q525	Beatitudes (texts from Qumran)
11Q13	Melchizedek (texts from Qumran)

Other Ancient Texts

Abraham	On the Life of Abraham (Philo)
Ad.	Adelphi (Terence)
Aeth.	Aethiopica (Heliodorus)
Ag.	Agamemnon (Aeschylus)
Ag. Ap.	Against Apion (Josephus)
Agr.	De Lege agraria (Cicero)

Alc.	Alcibiades (Plutarch)
Alex.	Alexander the False Prophet (Lucian)
Amic.	De amicitia (Cicero)
An.	De anima (Tertullian)
Anab.	Anabasis (Xenophon)
Ann.	Annales (Tacitus)
Ant.	Antigone (Sophocles)
Ant.	Jewish Antiquities (Josephus)
Ant. rom.	Antiquitates romanae (Dionysius of Halicarnassus)
1 Apol.	First Apology (Justin Martyr)
Apol.	Apologia (Plato, Tertullian)
Apos. Con.	Apostolic Constitutions
Ascen. Isa.	Ascension of Isaiah
As. Mos.	Assumption of Moses
Att.	Epistulae ad Atticum (Cicero)
b. Abod. Zar.	Abodah Zarah (Babylonian Talmud)
2 - 4 Bar.	2 - 4 Baruch
b B. Bat.	Bava Batra (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Ber.	Berakhot (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Ketub.	Ketubbot (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Meg.	Ketubbot (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Ned.	Nedarim (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Pesah..	Pesahim (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Sabb.	Sabbat (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Sanh.	Sanhedrin (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Sebu.	Sebuot (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Taan.	Taanit (Babylonian Talmud)
b. Yebam.	Yebamot (Babylonian Talmud)
Bapt.	De baptismo (Tertullian)
Barn.	Barnabas
Ben	De beneficiis (Seneca)
Bibl	Bibliotheca (Photius)
Bibl hist	Bibliotheca historica (Diodorus Siculus)

Bride	Advice to the Bride and Groom (Plutarch)
Cels	Contra Celsum (Origen)
Cic	Cicero (Plutarch)
Claud	Divus Claudius (Suetonius)
1 - 2 Clem	1 - 2 Clement
Comm. Dan	Commentarium in Danielem (Hippolytus)
Comm. Jo	Commentarii in evangelium Joannis (Origen)
Comm. Matt	Commentarium in evangelium Matthaei (Origen)
Corrept	De correptione et gratia (Augustine)
Cyr	Cyropaedia (Xenophon)
Decal	De decalogo (Philo)
Decl	Declamationes (Quintilian)
Def. orac	De defectu oraculorum (Plutarch)
Deipn	Deipnosophistae (Athenaeus)
Deut. Rab	Deuteronomy Rabbah
Dial	Dialogus cum Tryphone (Justin Martyr)
Diatr	Diatribai (Epictetus)
Did	Didache
Disc	Discourses (Epictetus)
Doctr. chr	De doctrina christiana (Augustine)
Dom	Domitianus (Suetonius)
Ebr	De ebrietate (Philo)
E Delph	De E apud Delphos (Plutarch)
1 - 2 En	1 - 2 Enoch
Ench	Enchiridion (Epictetus)
Ep	Epistulae morales (Seneca)
Eph.	To the Ephesians (Ignatius)
Epist.	Epistulae (Jerome, Pliny, Hippocrates)
Ep. Tra.	Epistulae ad Trajanum (Pliny)
Eth. nic.	Ethica nichomachea (Aristotle)
Exod. Rab.	Exodus Rabbah
Fam.	Epistulae ad familiares (Cicero)
Fid. Grat.	De fide ad Gratianum (Ambrose)

Flacc.	In Flaccum (Philo)
Flight	On Flight and Finding (Philo)
Fr. Prov.	Fragmenta in Proverbia (Hippolytus)
Gen. Rab.	Genesis Rabbah
Geogr.	Geographica (Strabo)
Gorg.	Gorgias (Plato)
Haer.	Adversus Haereses (Irenaeus)
Heir	Who Is the Heir? (Philo)
Hell.	Hellenica (Xenophon)
Hist.	Historicus (Polybius, Cassius Dio, Thucydides)
Hist.	Historiae (Herodotus, Tacitus)
Hist. eccl.	History of the Church (Eusebius)
Hist. Rome	The History of Rome (Livy)
Hom. Acts	Homilies on Acts (John Chrysostom)
Hom. Col.	Homilies on Colossians (John Chrysostom)
Hom. Jo.	Homilies on John (John Chrysostom)
Hom. Josh.	Homilies on Joshua (Origen)
Hom. Phil.	Homilies on Philippians (John Chrysostom)
Hom. Rom.	Homilies on Romans (John Chrysostom)
Hom. 1 Tim.	Homilies on 1 Tim othy (John Chrysostom)
Hom. 2 Tim.	Homilies on 2 Tim othy (John Chrysostom)
Hom. Tit.	Homilies on Titus (John Chrysostom)
Hypoth.	Hypothetica (Philo)
Inst.	Institutio oratoria (Quintilian)
Jos. Asen.	Joseph and Aseneth
Joseph	On the Life of Joseph (Philo)
Jub.	Jubilees
J. W.	Jewish War (Josephus)
L.A.E.	Life of Adam and Eve
Leg.	Legum allegoriae (Philo)
Legat.	Legatio ad Gaium (Philo)
Let. Aris.	Letter of Aristeas
Lev. Rab.	Leviticus Rabbah

Liv. Pro.	Lives of the Prophets
m. Bek.	Bekhorot (Mishnah)
m. Bik.	Bikkurim (Mishnah)
m. Git..	Git.t.in (Mishnah)
m. Mak.	Makkot (Mishnah)
m. Mid.	Middot (Mishnah)
m. Naz.	Nazir (Mishnah)
m. Ned.	Nedarim (Mishnah)
m. Nid.	Niddah (Mishnah)
m. Pesah.	Pesah.im (Mishnah)
m. SaHbb.	SaHbbat (Mishnah)
m. Sanh.	Sanhedrin (Mishnah)
m. Tamid	Tamid (Mishnah)
m. T.ehar.	T.eharot (Mishnah)
Magn.	To the Magnesians (Ignatius)
Mand.	Mandate (Shepherd of Hermas)
Marc.	Adversus Marcionem (Tertullian)
Mem.	Memorabilia (Xenophon)
Midr. Ps.	Midrash on Psalms
Migr.	De migratione Abrahami (Philo)
Mor.	Moralia (Plutarch)
Moses	On the Life of Moses (Philo)
Nat.	Naturalis historia (Pliny)
Num. Rab.	Numbers Rabbah
Onir.	Onirocritica (Artemidorus)
Or.	Orationes (Demosthenes)
Or.	Orationes (Dio Chrysostom)
Paed.	Paedagogus (Clement of Alexandria)
Peregr.	The Passing of Peregrinus (Lucian)
Pesiq. Rab.	Pesiqta Rabbati
Pesiq. Rab Kah.	Pesiqta of Rab Kahana
Phaed.	Phaedo (Plato)
Phil.	To the Philippians (Polycarp)

Phld.	To the Philadelphians (Ignatius)
Phorm.	Phormio (Terence)
Planc.	Pro Plancio (Cicero)
Plant.	De plantatione (Philo)
Pol.	Politica (Aristotle)
Pol.	To Polycarp (Ignatius)
Posterity	On the Posterity of Cain (Origen)
Praescr.	De praescriptione haereticorum (Tertullian)
Princ.	De principiis (Origen)
Prom.	Prometheus vinctus (Aeschylus)
Pss. Sol.	Psalms of Solomon
Pud.	De pudicitia (Tertullian)
Pyth.	Pythionikai (Pindar)
Pyth. orac.	De Pythiae oraculis (Plutarch)
Quaest. conv.	Quaestionum convivialum libri IX (Plutarch)
Quint. fratr.	Epistulae ad Quintum fratrem (Cicero)
Rab. Perd.	Pro Rabirio Perduellionis Reo (Cicero)
Resp.	Respublica (Plato)
Rewards	On Rewards and Punishments (Philo)
Rhet.	Volumina rhetorica (Philodemus)
Rom.	To the Romans (Ignatius)
Rosc. com.	Pro Roscio comoedo (Cicero)
Sacrifices	On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Philo)
Sat.	Satirae (Horace, Juvenal)
Sera	De sera numinis vindicta (Plutarch)
Serm.	Sermones (Augustine)
Sib. Or.	Sibylline Oracles
Sim.	Similitudes (Shepherd of Hermas)
Smyrn.	To the Smyrnaeans (Ignatius)
Somn.	De somniis (Philo)
Spec.	De specialibus legibus (Philo)
Stat.	Ad populum Antiochenum de statuis (John Chrysostom)
Strom.	Stromata (Clement of Alexandria)

T. Ash.	Testament of Asher
T. Dan	Testament of Dan
T. Gad	Testament of Gad
Tg. Neof.	Targum Neofiti
Tg. Onq.	Targum Onqelos
Tg. Ps.-J.	Targum Pseudo-Jonathan
Theaet.	Theaetetus (Plato)
t. H>ul.	H>ullin (Tosefta)
T. Jos.	Testament of Joseph
T. Jud.	Testament of Judah
T. Levi	Testament of Levi
T. Mos.	Testament of Moses
T. Naph.	Testament of Naphtali
Trall.	To the Trallians (Ignatius)
T. Reu.	Testament of Reuben
Tusc.	Tusculanae disputationes (Cicero)
Verr.	In Verrem (Cicero)
Virt.	De virtutibus (Philo)
Vis	Visions (Shepherd of Her
Vit. Apoll.	Vita Apollonii (Philostratus)
Vit. beat.	De vita beata (Seneca)
Vit. soph.	Vitae sophistarum (Philostratus)
y. Abod. Zar.	Abodah Zarah (Jerusalem Talmud)
y. H. ag.	H. agigah (Jerusalem Talmud)
y. Sabb.	Sabbat (Jerusalem Talmud)

Journals, Periodicals, Reference Works, Series

AASOR	Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ABR	Australian Biblical Review
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library

ABW	Archaeology in the Biblical World
ACCS	Ancient Chris tian Commentary on Scripture
ACNT	Augsburg Commentaries on the New Testament
AJSL	American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature
AnBib	Analecta biblica
ANEP	The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament
ANET	Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament
ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
AnOr	Analecta orientalia
ANRW	Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
ASORMS	American Schools of Oriental Research Monograph Series
ASTI	Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute
AThR	Anglican Theological Review
AUSDDS	Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series
AUSS	Andrews University Seminary Studies
BA	Biblical Archaeologist
BAGD	Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, and Danker (2d ed.). Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Chris tian Literature
BAR	Biblical Archaeology Review
BASOR	Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research
BBR	Bulletin for Biblical Research
BDAG	Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich (3d ed.). Greek- English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Chris tian Literature
BDB	Brown, Driver, and Briggs.A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament
BDF	Blass, Debrunner, and Funk. A Greek Grammar of the New Testa-ment and Other Early Chris tian Literature
BEB	Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
Ber	Berytus
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theo-logicarum lovaniensium
BGU	Aegyptische Urkunden aus den Königlichen Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin, Griechische Urkunden

BI	Biblical Illustrator
Bib	Biblica
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation
BibOr	Biblica et orientalia
BibS(N)	Biblische Studien (Neukirchen)
Bijdr	Bijdragen: Tijdschrit voor filosofie en theologie
BJRL	Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BR	Biblical Research
BRev	Bible Review
BSac	Bibliotheca sacra
BST	The Bible Speaks Today
BT	The Bible Translator
BTB	Biblical Theology Bulletin
BZ	Biblische Zeitschrift
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CAD	Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
CahRB	Cahiers de la Revue biblique
CBC	Cambridge Bible Commentary
CBQ	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
CGTC	Cambridge Greek Testament Commentary
CH	Church History
ChrT	Christianity Today
CIG	Corpus inscriptionum graecarum
CIL	Corpus inscriptionum latinarum
CJT	Canadian Journal of Theology
ConBNT	Coniectanea biblica: New Testament Series
ConBOT	Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series
COS	The Context of Scripture

CTJ	Calvin Theological Journal
CTM	Concordia Theological Monthly
CTR	Criswell Theological Review
DDD	Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
DRev	Downside Review
DukeDivR	Duke Divinity Review
EA	EI-Amarna tablets
EBC	Expositor's Bible Commentary
ECC	Eerdmans Critical Commentary
EcR	Ecumenical Review
EDNT	Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament
EGT	Expositor's Greek Testament
ErIsr	Eretz-Israel
ESCJ	Etudes sur le christianisme et le judaisme (Studies in Chris tian ity and Judaism)
EstBib	Estudios biblicos
ETS	Evangelical Theological Society
EuroJTh	European Journal of Theology
EvQ	Evangelical Quarterly
ExAud	Ex auditu
Exeg	Exegetica
ExpTim	Expository Times
FF	Foundations and Facets
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
GBS	Guides to Biblical Scholarship
GKC	Genesius' Hebrew Grammar
GNS	Good News Studies
GR	Greece and Rome
Grammar	A Grammar of the Greek New Testament; in the Light of Historical Research (A. T. Robertson)
GRBS	Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies

HALOT	Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm. The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament
HBD	HarperCollins Bible Dictionary
HBT	Horizons in Biblical Theology
Herm	Hermeneia commentary series
HeyJ	Heythrop Journal
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament
HNTC	Harper's New Testament Commentaries
Hor	Horizons
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTKNT	Herders theologischer Kommen-tar zum Neuen Testament
HTR	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
HUCA	Hebrew Union College Annual
IB	Interpreter's Bible
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
IBS	Irish Biblical Studies
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
IDBSup	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplement
IJT	Indian Journal of Theology
Int	Interpretation
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, 2d ed.
IVPNTC	IVP New Testament Commentary
JAAR	Journal of the American Academy of Religion
JAARSup	JAAR Supplement Series
JANESCU	Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University
JAOS	Journal of the American Oriental Society
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JBMW	Journal for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood
Jeev	Jeevadhara
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

JNES	Journal of Near Eastern Studies
JNSL	Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages
JPOS	Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society
JPS	Jewish Publication Society
JQR	Jewish Quarterly Review
JRS	Journal of Roman Studies
JSNT	Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup	JSNT Supplement Series
JSOT	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JSOTSup	JSOT Supplement Series
JSP	Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha
JSS	Journal of Semitic Studies
JTC	Journal for Theology and the Church
JTS	Journal of Theological Studies
K&D	Keil and Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament
KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament
KTU	Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit
L&N	Louw and Nida. Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains
LCC	Library of Chris tian Classics
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LEC	Library of Early Chris tian ity
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, and Jones. A Greek-English Lexicon
MM	Moulton and Milligan. The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament
NAC	New American Commentary
NBD	New Bible Dictionary, 2d ed.
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
Neot	Neotestamentica
NewDocs	New Documents Illustrating Early Chris tian ity
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIDNTT	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

NIDOTTE	New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NIVSB	Zondervan NIV Study Bible
Notes	Notes on Translation
NovT	Novum Testamentum
NovTSup	Novum Testamentum Supplements
NPNF	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
NTC	New Testament Commentary (Baker)
NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch
NTG	New Testament Guides
NTS	New Testament Studies
NTT	New Testament Theology
NTTS	New Testament Tools and Studies
OJRS	Ohio Journal of Religious Studies
OLA	Orientalia lovaniensia analecta
Or	Orientalia (NS)
OTL	Old Testament Library
OtSt	Oudtestamentische Studien
PEGLMBS	Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Bible Societies
PEQ	Palestine Exploration Quarterly
PG	Patrologia graeca
PL	Patrologia latina
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
Presb	Presbyterion
PresR	Presbyterian Review
PRSt	Perspectives in Religious Studies
PTMS	Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series
PTR	Princeton Theological Review
RB	Revue biblique
RBibLit	Review of Biblical Literature
RefJ	Reformed Journal

RelSRev	Religious Studies Review
ResQ	Restoration Quarterly
RevExp	Review and Expositor
RHPR	Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses
RTR	Reformed Theological Review
SBB	Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBJT	Southern Baptist Journal of Theology
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLSP	Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBLWAW	Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World
SBT	Studies in Biblical Theology
ScEccl	Sciences ecclésiastiques
ScrHier	Scripta hierosolymitana
SE	Studia evangelica
SEG	Supplementum epigraphicum graecum
Sem	Semitica
SJLA	Studies in Judaism of Late Antiquity
SJT	Scottish Journal of Theology
SNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTSU	Studien zum Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt
SP	Sacra Pagina
SR	Studies in Religion
ST	Studia theologica
Str-B	Strack, H. L., and P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments
SVF	Stoicorum veterum fragmenta
SwJT	Southwestern Journal of Theology
TA	Tel Aviv
TBT	The Bible Today
TDNT	Kittel and Friedrich. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Botterweck and Ringgren. Theological Dictionary of the Old

TDOT	Testament
TF	Theologische Forschung
THAT	Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament
Them	Themelios
ThEv	Theologia Evangelica
THKNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament
ThTo	Theology Today
TJ	Trinity Journal
TLNT	Theological Lexicon of the New Testament
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentaries
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TS	Theological Studies
TWOT	Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament
TynBul	Tyndale Bulletin
TZ	Theologische Zeitschrift
UBD	Unger's Bible Dictionary
VE	Vox evangelica
VT	Vetus Testamentum
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
WTJ	Westminster Theological Journal
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
YCS	Yale Classical Studies
ZAW	Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
ZNW	Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älterern Kirche
ZPEB	Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible
ZWT	Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie

General

AD	anno Domini (in the year of [our] Lord)
Akkad.	Akkadian
Arab.	Arabic
Aram.	Aramaic
BC	before Christ
ca.	circa (around, about, approximately)
cf.	confer, compare
ch(s).	chapter(s)
d.	died
diss.	dissertation
ed(s).	editor(s), edited by, edition
e.g.	exempli gratia, for example
esp.	especially
et al.	et alii, and others
EV	English versions of the Bible
f(f).	and the following one(s)
fig.	figuratively
frg.	fragment
Gk.	Greek
GK	Goodrick & Kohlenberger numbering system
Heb.	Hebrew
ibid.	ibidem, in the same place
i.e.	id est, that is
Lat.	Latin
lit.	literally
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
n(n).	note(s)
n.d.	no date
NS	New Series
p(p).	page(s)
par.	parallel (indicates textual parallels)
repr.	reprinted
rev.	revised

s.v.	sub verbo, under the word
Syr.	Syriac
TR	Textus Receptus (Greek text of the KJV translation)
trans.	translator, translated by
v(v).	verse(s)
vs.	versus

GENESIS

JOHN H. SAILHAMER

Introduction

1. Historical Background
2. Unity
3. Authorship, Date, and Place of Origin
4. Purpose
5. Literary Form
6. Genesis and the Final Shape of the Primary History
7. Genesis and the Tanak
8. Bibliography
9. Outline

1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little is known about the origin and authorship of Genesis. The book is a part of the Pentateuch. Both Jewish tradition and the NT ascribe it to Moses (cf. Jn 1:17; 5:46; 7:19, 23). Though many modern biblical scholars doubt the Mosaic authorship of most of the book, there is little evidence within the book itself to warrant such wholesale skepticism. Generally, the question of the authorship of Genesis is taken up within the context of theories regarding the literary history of the narratives that make up the Pentateuch. Similarly, questions of its authorship have been bound up with doubts regarding the historicity of many of the narratives as well as varying assessments of the nature and purpose of the narratives.

Fortunately, an understanding and an appreciation of the book are not dependent on a final answer to questions of historical background, author, unity, and composition. In the final analysis, an understanding of Genesis and its message comes from reading the book itself. No amount of historical and diachronic literary scholarship can replace the simple reading of the text as the primary means for determining the nature and purpose of this book.

We must distinguish two forms of background material in the study of Genesis: (1) the historical background or context within which the book was

written (the author's context), and (2) the historical background or context of the events recorded in the book. In the first we have in mind a specific time and place in which Genesis was composed. We look for why the book was written, who wrote it, and for whom. In the second we must look over a wide array of settings for the events of the book, taking us from the garden of Eden to the flood, to the building of the city of Babylon, to the land of the patriarchs, and finally to the land of Egypt. In the present section we will discuss the background of Genesis in the second sense of the term — the background of the events of the book. Under Authorship, we will discuss the probable background and context within which the book was written.

For purposes of historical background, the events of Genesis can be divided into two types. On the one hand are the events that happened on a global or even cosmic scale: e.g., creation (chs. 1 – 2) and the flood (chs. 6 – 8). On the other hand are the events that happened in an isolated, localized way: e.g., Noah's drunkenness (ch. 9) and Abraham's vision (ch. 15). By far the great majority of events in Genesis happened within a limited sphere of time and location and can best be described simply as "family matters." The narratives of the book turn from major catastrophes, such as the flood or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, to seemingly incidental encounters between individuals. It is a part of this book's central purpose to show that these two spheres belong together in God's eyes. The God of the universe, the Creator, cares about and is concerned with the personal lives of every individual in his world.

Significantly, both the major and the minor individual types of historical events are the most difficult to reconstruct by modern historical methods. On the whole, events such as creation and the flood do not belong to the field of historical research at all. Though they are historical in nature, in that they actually happened as recorded, as a factual record they fall in the domain of the natural sciences: astronomy, geology, and biology. A study of the Genesis flood, whose magnitude evidentially appears to have been global in scope, would be the task of the science of geology. By contrast, isolated events in the lives of a few individuals such as Abraham and his family can be studied only in the general terms of historical and cultural anthropology of the ancient world. It is expecting too much to insist that the biblical archaeologist find the remains of Abraham's own home and possessions, or Abraham's gravesite. It is more than enough to show that the biblical account of the life of Abraham conforms well to the historical and cultural setting of the ancient world in which he lived.

2. UNITY

The book of Genesis is characterized by both a discernible unity as well as a noticeable lack of uniformity.[1]The history of the study of the interpretation of Genesis is marked by a tendency to stress one of these characteristics at the expense of the other. Critical scholarship has focused on the lack of uniformity of style and vocabulary as a sign of a lack of unity in the composition and message of the book. Conservative scholarship often ignores the rough edges of the narratives, thinking that doing so safeguards the unity of the book. To sustain a realistic understanding of the unity of the book one must have a proper appreciation of the nature of its compositional strategy.

Much like the writers of the NT Gospels and the later historical books of the OT (e.g., Kings and Chronicles), the writer of Genesis appears to have composed his work from "archival" written records of God's great deeds in the past. We know from specific references within the historical narratives that records were available at an early stage in Israel's history (Ex 17:14; Nu 21:14; Jos 10:13). Similar records were likely kept at earlier periods within the individual households of the patriarchs and tribal ancestors. In any event, the narratives within the book appear to be largely composed of small, self-contained stories worked into larger units by means of itineraries and genealogical tables. If such is the case, one would not expect to find absolute uniformity of style among the individual narratives any more than we might expect an absolute uniformity in the later historical books (e.g., Kings, Chronicles, or the Gospels). Indeed, we would more likely expect the writer, working under God's direction, to have preserved his records as he received them, sacrificing uniformity and cohesion where necessary for the sake of historical faithfulness.

The unity of Genesis, therefore, should be seen in its coherent compositional strategy rather than in an absolutely smooth and uniform narrative. The narrative about building the city of Babylon (11:1 – 9) is almost entirely self-contained and shows little external relationship with other narratives within its immediate context. Yet this narrative plays a strategic role in the development of one of the major themes in the book: the restoration of the primeval blessing through the

call of Abraham. By placing the narrative between two genealogies of "Shem," the author establishes a relationship between the central point of the narrative — "Let us make a name ['Shem'] for ourselves" (11:4) — and the central point of the patriarchal narratives — "and God said, 'I will make your name ['Shem'] great' " (12:2a). Thus the genealogies of "Shem" provide a narrative link between the story of the fall of Babylon (11:1 – 9) and the account of the call of Abraham (12:1 – 3). The picture of the narratives of Genesis that emerges from such observations is that of a carefully wrought account of Israel's early history fashioned from the narratives and genealogical tables of Israel's own ancestral archives.

3. AUTHORSHIP, DATE, AND PLACE OF ORIGIN

Who wrote the book of Genesis? When, where, and why was it written? Since Genesis is a part of the Pentateuch, the authorship of Genesis is bound up with the question of the authorship of the Pentateuch. Like most biblical books in the OT, however, the Pentateuch does not contain the name of its author.

Early tradition ascribes the authorship of most of the Pentateuch to Moses. The last eight verses (Dt 34:5 – 12), which contain the report of the death and burial of Moses, are usually excluded. Throughout the Pentateuch Moses is associated with writing some narratives in the Pentateuch. Moses, for example, records the account of the battle with the Amalekites (Ex 17:14). Most of the laws in the Pentateuch are portrayed as having been dictated by God to Moses and also written down by him (cf. Ex 20:1). Later biblical texts such as Joshua 8:31 – 32 likewise speak of the literary contribution of Moses to the laws now contained in the Pentateuch. It seems apparent that Jesus and the writers of the NT believed Moses was the author of much, if not all, of the Pentateuch (e.g., Jn 5:46). While we may concur with these later biblical authors, we should not lose sight of the fact that the Pentateuch itself comes to us as an anonymous work and was apparently intended to be read as such.

Before attempting to identify the author, it is important to have a clear picture of how the book was written. There are three general views of the authorship of

the Pentateuch: the common (or traditional) view, the critical view, and the compositional view, which represents the view taken in this commentary on Genesis.

The Common (or Traditional) View

According to the common view, central (i.e., well-known) biblical persons, such as Moses, Joshua, Ezra, and others, were the primary authors of the OT books. They used historical records available to them to write of the past events in the Bible. For events in their own day, they relied on their own eyewitness observations. In most cases they simply wrote down accounts of events as they happened. The biblical account of Moses' recording of Israel's battle with the Amalekites in Exodus 17:14 is a prime example. After the battle, God commands Moses to make a record of the defeat of the Amalekites; it is to be a source for Israel's later memory of God's great acts of salvation against their enemies. This account shows how Moses continued to write the Pentateuch as the events themselves transpired. The OT thus took shape gradually and progressively as each successive event was recorded. Always, however, according to the common view, the process was controlled by a single, known author.

Though the common view is sufficiently precise about *who* wrote the OT books, it is not as clear on the details about *how* the books were written. Unlike many of today's critical scholars, who seem preoccupied with describing *how* the books were written, the common view tended to focus only on the identity of their authors.

The lasting value of the traditional view has been its "holistic" approach to the biblical texts. By viewing the biblical books as the works of individual authors, emphasis naturally focuses on the meaning of the work as a whole. Modern biblical scholarship, with its radically different view of authorship (see below), moves in the other direction. In many scholarly studies of Genesis, the question of *how* the OT books were written has taken center stage. This has shifted attention away from seeing Genesis and the other OT books as "whole texts" and viewing them merely as the bits and pieces of supposed, earlier documents that have only imperfectly survived in the final text.

Did Moses use sources? Many today proceed on the assumption that if we can answer the question of *how* the OT books were written, there is no further need for the question of *who* wrote them. It is, for example, commonly assumed by biblical scholars — erroneously I believe — that if Moses wrote the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch, he would not have used sources or previously edited documents. That being the case, many have attempted to disprove the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch simply by showing that there are written sources lying behind its present form. This has been a major line of opposition to the idea of Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

It is in cases just such as this that we must be careful to examine the underlying assumptions of both the traditional view as well as the opposition to it. We must raise, for example, both the question of *how* the Pentateuch was written and that of *who* its author was. If it can be shown that the author of the Pentateuch used written sources and if the traditional view is correct that Moses was that author, then we should accept the apparent conclusion that Moses used sources in writing the Pentateuch. In that case, Moses would have been no different from the author of the books of Kings or the authors of the Gospels. The use of written sources was a common feature of the authorship of many biblical books. The monumental conservative work on the OT by Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown readily conceded that

> in the composition of those parts of the Pentateuch relating to matters which were not within the sphere of his personal knowledge, Moses would and did avail himself of existing records . .. interweaving them into his narrative conformably with that unity of design which so manifestly pervades the entire Pentateuch.[2]

As it is commonly stated, there is inherently little that we might want to object to in the traditional view. Its chief weakness lies in its lack of detail. Though it has gone to great lengths to discover *who* wrote the OT books, it has said little about *how* they were written. This has proven to be a serious omission. Failure to address the full range of questions relating to authorship leaves the traditional view without a basis for a well-formulated answer to those who might challenge the integrity of Scripture. To state the obvious, the traditional view is grounded only in tradition; it is not sufficiently grounded in an actual examination of the Scriptures themselves.

A second serious omission in the traditional view is its lack of a clear focus on the final form of the text. To be sure, the traditional view saw itself as focusing on the present text, but it did so with a great deal of imprecision. Often in discussions of the authorship of OT books, those who held the traditional view failed to see the actual "book" in view. They talked about the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, but at the same time they excluded the last eight verses of the Pentateuch (Dt 34:5 – 12), which speak of the death and burial of Moses. To most today it is obvious that Moses did not write that part of "the book." But what is the Pentateuch if not what is now in the Pentateuch? This may appear to be a rather small point, but it reveals the kind of lack of precision that lies behind the common (traditional) view.

The (Literary-) Critical View

The "critical" view of biblical authorship maintains that the books of the OT are not derived from authors in the traditional sense. According to this view, the OT books are little more than compilations of earlier documents gathered from a long history of oral and written sources. The biblical books are not books in the usual sense of the term. They are the end result of a long process of literary growth — a long process that involved numerous uses and reuses of the same written material in new contexts, along with countless additions and supplementation. To speak of an author, let alone Moses, has little merit in such a context.

According to the critical view, the biblical books arose out of the needs of various Israelite communities over long periods of time. In times of crises, or simply to give an expanded meaning to everyday life, various communities within ancient Israel told and retold the stories passed on to them. Each community understood the stories and traditions as reflections of their own present lives; hence they told these stories in their own way and with their own present circumstances in view. When they retold their stories, according to the critical view, they changed the details to reflect their current situation. For example, the words of one prophet might be used by another to tell his story. The deeds of one patriarch might be recast as the deeds of another. The individual books of the Bible as we have them today may thus represent only the last version of the meaning of Israel's past. Many other viewpoints and versions of

that story may have preceded the accounts preserved in the biblical books.

Though various critical views of the making of the Pentateuch have come in and out of vogue, OT scholarship as a whole has accepted the main tenets of this position up to the present day. That does not mean, however, that there were not also many biblical scholars who never, or rarely, accepted the critical approach. There have in fact been many able-minded opponents of the critical view who have risen to defend the traditional views of the authorship of the Pentateuch and other biblical books. Those valuable works have continued to be appreciated by readers of the Bible and still enjoy wide circulation today.

Beginning in the twentieth century, the study of biblical archaeology has demonstrated the historical feasibility of many long-held traditional views of authorship. In the early days of biblical criticism, for example, many believed that Moses could *not* have written a work of the magnitude and sophistication of the Pentateuch. But biblical archaeologists can now point to numerous examples of long and sophisticated works from Moses' time that presume a considerable level of literacy.[3]Also, the use of the alphabet at an early period in Israel's history suggests that a functional literacy was already widespread in Israel in Moses' day.[4]Law codes and narratives resembling those in the Pentateuch were not uncommon. A growing body of archaeological knowledge shows that traditional views of Mosaic authorship are not hopelessly anachronistic but are, in fact, historically plausible. Such examples have been multiplied many times over since the twentieth century.

What characterizes modern critical studies of the authorship of the OT books is the view that they are not, as we now have them, the product of an "authorship" in the usual sense of the term. They are, rather, the product of a long process of compilation and editing. That process in itself is often more important and interesting to the biblical scholar than the final product of the OT books themselves. If one is to speak of biblical "authorship" at all under such circumstances, one should speak only of the "authorships" (plural!) of the biblical books. According to most contemporary approaches, there was no single author for any OT book. There are, rather, many "authors," each one with particular concerns and messages to be brought out in the material of the book. It is thus thought that the books of the OT were composed over many centuries, in numerous situations, and with multiple purposes in mind. In the end, little

attention has been given to the books as we now have them. Such an approach presents serious obstacles to understanding the biblical books we have in the OT today.

This is not the time or place to give a thorough assessment of the modern critical view of the OT scriptures. I want here only to point to what I believe are its major strengths and weaknesses.

Much turns today on the question of the historical reliability of the OT narratives. Modern critical scholarship has a quite low assessment of their historical worth. I believe such a low assessment is not well founded and is without serious and consistent historical support. It is born out of a general and unwarranted skepticism of all historical records. It is our view that when seen in the context of what these narratives say about the ancient world and in the light of what we know about ancient history from other sources, the OT narratives are remarkably accurate accounts of past events. It is a curious fact that at the very time when historical and archaeological data confirming the reliability of the OT history are continuing to mount, critical scholarship has found itself moving in an increasingly skeptical direction.

We must bear in mind that the skepticism of modern critical scholarship is often just that — skepticism. Methodologically, many modern scholars prefer to question or doubt the historical reliability of the OT narratives until they are explicitly proven to be true. Such an approach, needless to say, puts an enormous burden on the need to *prove* the countless details of the biblical narratives to be true and accurate. One can understand the rationale for such an approach and even concede its validity in certain cases. We should not expect an historian, as such, to take everything in the Bible at face value without any attempt at verification. What is not possible to concede, however, is the assumption that such an approach is the only scientifically acceptable procedure for studying the OT narratives.

In light of the universal acknowledgment that the OT narratives do, in fact, preserve some accurate historical information, it is reasonable and methodologically sound to give them the benefit of the doubt unless they can be proven false. This is especially the case where the biblical events do not lend themselves to being independently confirmed in detail. How could we ever

verify what Abraham said to his wife Sarah on a particular day enroute to Egypt (Ge 12:10 – 20)? Their conversation on that day is historically irrecoverable. If the biblical account of Abraham's journey to Egypt is itself true to life within the context of the ancient world in which they lived, and if aspects of the narrative can be shown to be historically accurate, then it is reasonable to believe that its account of Abraham's conversation with Sarah is also reliable. What often has to be assessed is the general historical reliability of the narratives themselves. Do they reflect accurately the time period and culture they purport to depict? Do the stories contradict themselves or other events we know to have occurred from eyewitness accounts?

In the Genesis narrative, for example, it is distinctly stated in the opening verse that Abraham and Sarah went down to Egypt because "there was a famine in the land" (Ge 12:10). Now we know that that particular reason suits the historical situation of ancient Canaan and Egypt quite well. There are, in fact, wall paintings on Egyptian tombs from this same period showing Asiatic visitors in Egypt (Beni Hasan Tomb of Prince Khnumhotep III,Tomb of Prince Khety, dated ca. 1991 – 1786 BC). These are practically ancient photographs of the families of Abraham and Jacob. Moreover, a contemporary report of an Egyptian frontier guard tells of the official authorization of Edomites to enter Egypt "to keep them alive and to keep their cattle alive." This sounds like a quotation right out of the Bible (Ge 42:2), but it isn't. It is from an account contemporary with the biblical events.

One can perhaps understand such methodological skepticism in dealing with ancient texts. A historian would not want to take all the claims of any ancient document at face value, even if they should later be proven true. From a historical perspective, historical claims should be proven, or at least verified, before they are accepted as established fact. There is a thin line, however, between such methodological doubt and an actual distrust of the reliability of the OT narratives. In my opinion, to the extent that modern biblical criticism simply distrusts the OT narratives, it goes beyond the legitimate bounds of its historical "criticism." The OT narratives have many times demonstrated that they are reliable historical documents. Where they can be tested or falsified, they have proven to be reliable. There comes a point at which one must acknowledge the general reliability of such ancient texts. In areas where the events in such texts have not been specifically verified, the benefit of doubt rests in their favor. We believe the OT narratives, given their long record of proven reliability, have

earned the right to be trusted until falsified by contemporary historical records.

An important positive feature of the modern critical view is its attempt to understand the nature of the composition of the OT books. One can even speak of a trend among some critics today that assigns increasingly less importance to the task of reconstructing earlier “documents” and more importance to retracing the activities that have led to the composition of the final shape of the text. To be sure, this is not to say that critical scholars no longer believe such “documents” existed. Few critical scholars today would doubt the existence of sources in the Bible. What is no longer the primary concern of modern criticism is the task of reconstructing the documents that lay behind the present text.

Many modern critical scholars believe the “documents” lying behind the present biblical texts were either too fragmentary to reconstruct or were melded so closely into the final text that it is now impossible to separate them confidently from their context. Also, many believe that the sources used by the biblical writers may have circulated in oral form before they were written down and eventually used in composing the biblical narratives. That, of course, does not rule out the likelihood that some records were written from the start. Few biblical scholars today, however, have the appetite for the painstaking and often fruitless task of unscrambling the literary fabric that now forms the biblical stories. What this means is that the attention of biblical scholarship has, at least in many circles, turned to the biblical narratives themselves, the ones that now lie before us in the present text. Though there is still little interest among biblical critics today in viewing the Pentateuch as a Mosaic document — that is, a document written or contributed to largely by Moses — there is a great and growing interest in viewing the Pentateuch as a document composed of many ancient written records and reflecting a final unity of design.

I believe that such a view of the composition of the OT narratives provides a helpful starting point for understanding the history of the Bible and its message. Gone are the days when, under the influence of the goal of reconstructing earlier documents, biblical scholars sought to dissect and label every presumed segment of the biblical texts. Gone also are the days when biblical scholars were more concerned with what the earlier documents said than what the OT, in its final form (as we now have it), says. With the help of a wealth of new information about the formation of ancient texts and early writing practices, biblical scholars are able to focus their attention on the composition and meaning of the biblical

texts now in the Hebrew Bible. It is along these lines that the present commentary on the book of Genesis will proceed.

The Compositional View

We turn now to the third view of authorship, the compositional view. Here we ask what biblical scholars have had to say about the composition of the OT books. What do we know about the formation of ancient texts and how they were written? What do we know, specifically, about the composition of the OT in general and the book of Genesis in particular?

The compositional view attempts to trace the ways biblical authors organized and shaped their various texts into unified and whole books. It focuses on the historical authors of the biblical books. It also attempts to understand the theological characteristics of their finished works.[5]This view approaches the OT text as a literary unit and attempts to describe its literary strategy. Behind such compositional strategies lies the intent of the inspired biblical authors.

When viewed as a whole, biblical texts are single literary units composed of many small or large pieces and fragments of ancient texts. In the interweaving of these parts into a whole, a discernible strategy can be traced throughout the entire work. *That strategy is the key to the meaning and theology of the book*. In the Pentateuch, as we develop in more detail below, important poetic texts are deliberately attached to large narrative segments in order to provide those narratives with a central thematic interpretation.[6]Also, the various law codes within the Pentateuch are deliberately placed within a narrative framework.[7]

The theological motivation behind the strategy of the Pentateuch appears to be twofold. First, it demonstrates the failure of the Sinaitic covenant and the hope that lies in a yet-future new covenant.[8]In this respect it is similar in meaning and intent to the rest of the books of the OT, particularly those of the prophetic literature. Second, the Pentateuch looks forward to the future for the coming of a savior-king “in the last days.” That king will defeat Israel’s enemies and restore God’s blessing to all humanity.[9]It is for the purpose of developing those themes that Genesis was attached to the beginning of the Pentateuch.

***In-Textuality*.** The compositional strategy of a biblical text can be traced at various levels.[10]The cohesive nature of the strategy of the smallest literary unit is called “in-textuality.” Schmidt defines in-textuality as a distinct “illocutionary act,” or statement, performed by a segment of a text. A text as a total communication act is a coherent network of such discreet utterances. Any one of these discreet segments is an “in-text.”[11]This simply means that the various parts of even the smallest literary units can be expected to belong together and to make sense as a whole.[12]In-textuality is the inner coherence of the smallest units of text. We will devote a considerable amount of attention to this strategy in the following commentary.

The analysis of the compositional strategy of a biblical book such as Genesis begins with the in-textuality of each biblical passage. The inner-cohesion of the smallest passage is as important as the structural unity of the entire book. Finding the in-textuality of a biblical passage involves a close analysis of the smallest literary unit. One may employ various kinds of critical analysis. Form criticism, for example, may be necessary to demonstrate the boundaries of a discreet textual unit. By means of form criticism, a poem or a psalm may be detected by its formal characteristics. Source criticism can also be of use. The isolation of an earlier source in Isaiah 2:1 – 4 and Micah 4:1 – 3, for example, is a necessary prelude to an assessment of the compositional strategy of segments of these books.

In a text-oriented (compositional) approach, one must be careful, in seeking to describe the in-textuality of a passage, not to view the various critical methodologies as ends in themselves. The aim is always the text. Isolating a distinct literary form is of value only to the extent that it elucidates the present textual strategy of the whole book.

Much attention has been devoted to the in-textuality of biblical texts in recent years, often in response to the emphasis on source criticism of the previous generations. In the Genesis flood account, for example, source criticism holds that two distinct flood narratives have been merged into the present narrative. Recent studies of this passage, however, have revealed a distinct compositional strategy that encompasses the entire text:

Transitional Introduction (6:9 – 10)

1. Violence in Creation (6:11 – 12)
2. First Divine Speech (6:13 – 22)
3. Second Divine Speech (7:1 – 10)
4. Beginning of Flood (7:11 – 16)
5. The Rising Flood (7:17 – 24)

God Remembers Noah (8:1a)

6. The Receding Flood (8:1b – 5)
7. Drying of the Earth (8:6 – 14)
8. Third Divine Speech (8:15 – 19)
9. God's Resolve to Preserve Order (8:20 – 22)
10. Fourth Divine Speech (9:1 – 17)

Transitional Conclusion (9:18 – 19)[13]

What the above analysis of the flood account demonstrates is that there is a distinct in-textuality to the flood narrative. It has a shape and a strategy. The discovery and elucidation of such strategies is vital to a compositional approach to biblical authorship. It is precisely in such structures that one would expect to find the beginnings of a larger compositional strategy and ultimately a biblical theology of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

Inner-Textuality*.** Not only do we find strategies within the smallest units of text, but such strategies also often make up the fabric of whole biblical narratives and books. Such inner-linkage binding narratives into a whole text is called inner-textuality. By means of such links the biblical authors thematized the message they wanted their narratives to yield. *Inner*-textuality is thus of central concern to both OT interpretation and theology. To show examples of such strategies, we will discuss below some observations about the shape of the Pentateuch.[14]Inter-Textuality*:** While inner-textuality is the study of links within a text, *inter*-textuality is the study of links between and among whole texts and books. Many written texts, especially biblical ones, were written within the context of a knowledge and understanding of other texts. Often biblical authors assumed their readers were thoroughly conversant with those texts. On a large scale, the NT books, for example, assume a comprehensive understanding of the books of the OT. Many OT books also assume that their readers are aware of and

knowledgeable about other OT books.

Inter-textuality is often *explicit*, as, for example, the verbatim citation of the texts in Genesis 1 in Jeremiah 27:5; but it can also be *implicit*, as in the allusion to Genesis 49:11 in Isaiah's question, "Who is this one who comes from Edom?" (Isa 63:1). The reader who is competently aware of the themes and images of Genesis and the Pentateuch will have little trouble making the conection. The reader who is unaware of the inter-textuality, however, will be lost or at best will fail to appreciate all that the text has to say. Inter-textuality can also consist of direct allusions, such as the appeal of Isaiah 1:9 to Genesis 19: "Unless the LORD Almighty had left us some survivors [a remnant], we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah." The Isaiah passage alludes to the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 but does so by highlighting its view of a surviving remnant.

It is important to note that the *inner*-textuality of most biblical texts is sufficient for understanding a biblical book. There are usually enough clues to meaning within a single passage to enable the reader to understand it — at least in general terms. If the author intended an *inter*-textual link (a link to another book), it stands to reason that some loss of meaning would occur if a reader were unaware of those inter-textual links to the other book(s). If, however, an author has not intended any inter-textuality, then an attempt to read the text in terms of a supposed linkage with another text would likely distort the meaning of that text. This means that clear criteria of inter-textuality must be established and adhered to in biblical exegesis. One must always rely, in the last analysis, on the skill of being a competent reader. There must be textual clues within a specific text that trigger a reader's awareness of another text. If there is inter-textuality, poor or incompetent readers will not "get" everything they read in a text. However, for there to be a valid inter-textuality, there must be genuine clues for competent readers to follow.

One last word on inter-textuality in Genesis: We are accustomed to thinking of the biblical books in the order in which we read them. The fact that Genesis (and the Pentateuch) always comes first within the various orders of the OT books could lead us to conclude it does not contain references to the other books of the OT. That, however, may not be entirely correct. Not only do the early parts of Genesis contain references to later parts, as when Genesis 13:10 refers to the land chosen by Lot as beautiful and well watered "before the LORD destroyed

Sodom and Gomorrah" (Ge 19), but Genesis may also contain allusions to the themes and events in the remainder of the Pentateuch (see comments on 1:14 and 15:13) and even the rest of the OT (see comments on Ge 14).

4. PURPOSE[15]

The Compositional Shape of the Pentateuch

Genesis does not come to us as an isolated book. It does not stand alone. It is part of a larger work called the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses. Whatever one's view of the origin and diversity of the individual parts of the Pentateuch, it is widely recognized today that the canonical Pentateuch exhibits a unified structure with a common purpose. The task of discovering the purpose of a work as large and diverse as the Pentateuch is best achieved by means of a compositional analysis, that is, a description and retracing of the literary methods and techniques of its author. What units of written texts were used in the final text? What roles do the individual narratives play in light of the final shape of the whole? What final touches did the author give to the text that determine how it is to be read and received? What is the religious and theological viewpoint of the final text? These are some of the questions one should consider in determining the structure and shape — and ultimately the meaning — of Genesis within the Pentateuch.

It has frequently been recognized that the final shaping of the canonical Pentateuch involves the sorting and placement of material consisting of at least four literary types: narrative, poetry, law, and genealogy. The genealogical texts play an important role in the early sections of the Pentateuch, especially in Genesis, but as important as they are for the internal structure of Genesis, they do not lead to a fruitful conclusion about the shape or structure of the Pentateuch as a whole and the relationship of Genesis to it.

A similar verdict can be reached from a consideration of the several collections of laws within the Pentateuch. The importance of such collections is beyond dispute, but they do not appear to be the means by which the whole of

the Pentateuch has been shaped or organized. There is, however, a compositional strategy in Genesis and the Pentateuch that carries us throughout the entirety of these books. It consists in the way the author of Genesis and the Pentateuch has used poetry to highlight the central themes of the narratives. Thus close attention to the author's use of narrative and poetic texts throughout the Pentateuch sheds considerable light on the final shape of the work.

The technique of using a poetic speech to provide a thematic interpretation of a biblical narrative is well known in biblical literature. The sailors' sacrifices and vow to the Lord in the narrative of Jonah 1 (v.16), for example, are identified in the poem in chapter 2 with Jonah's own sacrifice and vow to the Lord. Jonah's words about his "salvation" from the Lord (2:10) are thus linked by the poem to the fate of the sailors.

This technique occurs frequently within recognizable segments of the Pentateuch. The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, for example, concludes with a short poetic speech (discourse) of Adam (2:23) followed by an epilogue (2:24). Even within this, the creation account itself in Genesis 1 concludes with the narrator's poem in Genesis 1:27. The account of the fall in chapter 3 concludes with a poetic discourse (vv.14 – 19) and an epilogue (vv.20 – 24). The account of Cain in ch. 4 concludes with another poetic discourse (vv.23 – 24) and an epilogue (vv.25 – 26). Also the genealogy in Genesis 5 concludes with a poem (v.29), as does the flood account (Ge 9:25 – 27). The fact that this pattern can be found throughout Genesis (see Notes on 1:1) suggests it was an important part of the compositional technique of the author of the book. This pattern also occurs in the Joseph story (chs. 37 – 48), which concludes with the poetic discourse of Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:15 – 16, 20).

It is thus of considerable importance to note that this same pattern of narrative, followed by a poetic speech and a short epilogue, recurs at an even higher level within the Pentateuch. The pattern is found, for example, in the inclusion of the large poetic text (49:1 – 27) at the close of the patriarchal narratives, along with the epilogue of ch. 50. The two major narratives that follow Genesis — that is, the exodus narratives and the wilderness narratives — both conclude with a poetic speech (Ex 15 and Nu 23 – 24). Finally, the pattern embraces the whole of the Pentateuch spanning Genesis (from ch. 1) to Deuteronomy, which concludes with the poetic "Song(s) of Moses" in chs. 32 – 33 and the epilogue of ch. 34. The clear presence of this same pattern at such a high level within the Penateuch

suggests that the technique was extended as part of the structure embracing the whole of Genesis and the Pentateuch.

If such a compositional strategy lies behind the final shape of the Pentateuch, as it appears, it would be wise to begin here with the question of the compositional shape of the whole of the book. If we have correctly identified the compositonal shape of the Pentateuch, our next step is to ask whether there are any additional written clues lying along the seams of these large units. Such written clues would point us to the author's ultimate purpose in writing the book. We would be wise to be guided by such clues in our understanding of the author's purpose at lower levels in the text. We must thus begin our investigation of the compositional purpose of Genesis and the Pentateuch with a closer look along the seams of these large units of narrative and poetry. Here we will attempt to uncover the basic hermeneutic of the author of the Pentateuch and from there demonstrate his use of that hermeneutic at lower levels in Genesis.

Narrative/Poetic Seams in the Pentateuch

At three macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has intentionally spliced a major poem at the conclusion of a large unit of narrative (Ge 49; Nu 24; Dt 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous compositional stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) calls an audience together (imperative: "Gather around," *hēʾāsʿpû*Ge 49:1; "Come," *lkâ*, Nu 24:14; "Assemble," *haqhîlû*, Dt 31:28) and proclaims (cohortative: "so I can tell you," *wʾʾ,aggîdâ*, Ge 49:1; "so I can advise you," ,*lkâ*, Nu 24:14; "so that I can speak," *wʾʾdabbʿrâ*, Dt 31:28) what "will happen" *ʾt ʿāṣʿkā*,, Ge 49:1; "will do," *yaʾʿśeh*, Nu 24:14; "will happen," *wʿqārāʾt*, Dt 31:29) in "the last days" (*bʿʾaḥʿrît hayyāmîm*, Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29).

The brief prologue to the poetic text in Genesis 49 tells us that the central figure, Jacob, had called together (*hēʾāsʿpû*,"gather") his sons to announce to them "what will happen to you in the last days" (*ʾēʾʿšer-yiqrāʾ ʾetkem bʿʾaḥʿrît hayyāmîm*,. Thus, however we may want to translate the terminology used in this seam introducing

the poetic discourse of Jacob, the author has provided the reader with an indispensable clue to its meaning: Jacob's poetic discourse was about what "will happen" (*yiqrā'*) "in the last days" (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*)

In an identical macrostructural position within the seam connecting the poetic text of Deuteronomy 32 with the preceding narrative of the Pentateuch, we find another prologue using the same terminology and motifs. The central figure, Moses, calls together (*haqhîlû*, Dt 31:28; NIV, "Assemble") the elders of the tribes to announce to them the "disaster" (v.29) that "will fall upon you in the last days" (*wᵉqārāʾt ʾetkembᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*, Dt 31:29; lit. trans.). Again the reader is afforded an all-important clue to the meaning of the poetic text and the narratives it helps to interpret. The poem is about "what will happen" (*wᵉqārāʾt*; NIV, "will fall") in the "last days" (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*) In the seams connecting both poetic texts (Ge 49 and Dt 32) to the preceding narrative segments and using the same terminology , the author has inserted an identical message to the reader as a clue that the poetic discourses are to be read with a view to what will happen "in the last days."

At one other crucial juncture connecting the large units of poetic and narrative texts in the Pentateuch (Nu 24:14), the same terminology (*qārāʾ bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*, "in the last days") occurs. Here, in the narrative prologue to the last words of Balaam, the author again provides the reader with the necessary hermeneutical clue to the meaning of the poetic texts. Again it has to do with the "last days" (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*). As in the other two passages, the events that lie yet in the future are revealed in the last words of the central figure in the narrative, Balaam. The fact that the identical phrase is translated differently in many English versions has resulted in its not being recognized as a part of the same compositional strategy. What should be stressed, however, is the nearly verbatim use of the same terminology in each of these programmatic introductions to the poems.

Such convergence of macrostructure, narrative motifs, and terminology among these three strategically important parts of the Pentateuch can hardly be accidental. The fact that *bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm* occurs only one other time in the Pentateuch, and that also within a macrostructural seam (Dt 4), argues strongly for our taking of these connecting segments as part of the final work that went into giving the Pentateuch its present shape. To state it clearly, these connecting segments reveal the work of the author of the Pentateuch. They are part of the work that went into uniting the Pentateuch into a completed whole. As such they

are a clear indication of the hermeneutic of this author, that is, how he understands the work he is writing and how he expects us to interpret the details. Not only does the author show throughout this work an intense interest in events of the past. The further fact that he repeatedly and strategically returns to the notion of the "last days" (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*) in giving his work its final shape reveals that his interest lies in the future as well.

To summarize what appears to be the overall strategy of the author in these three segments, we can say that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened in the past portends events that still lie in the future. To say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson for the future.

These observations lead to the following conclusion. A consideration of the macrostructural strategy lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch suggests the author worked within a clearly defined hermeneutic. Because of the terminology used (namely, "in the last days," *bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*), we can call this *a prophetic reading of the historical narratives*. The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to events that are yet future. Past events foreshadow the future.

We will see that such a hermeneutic leads to a kind of "narrative typology." The recorded past is seen as a script of the future. A "narrative typology" is not one that reads the past in the light of the future, but one that reads the future in the light of the past. A "narrative typology" is not a "typological" method, whereby we see the past through the lense of later events. In a "narrative typology" we are invited to view the future as it was once anticipated and interpreted through the lens of the prophetic hope. If Genesis is an embodiment of such a future hope, we should learn to look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch and in the book of Genesis.

A Narrative Typology

A small narrative segment that has attracted an extraordinary amount of

attention over the years is the account of Abraham's visit to Egypt in Genesis 12:10 – 20. The similarities between this narrative and that of Genesis 20 and 26 are well known. Such similarities are most often taken to be a sign of historical or literary dependency. Another way to view the similarities is to see them as part of a larger typological scheme intending to show that future events are foreshadowed by events of the past (see quote by Cassuto in the commentary on 12:1 – 10). In fact, many of the similarities in the patriarchal narratives may have originated out of such a strategy of narrative typology. Further evidence suggesting that this may be the case comes from a comparison between Genesis 12:1 – 13:4 and the large unitary narrative dealing with the Israelites' sojourn in Egypt (Ge 41 – Ex 12). The chart at Genesis 12:10 – 20 suggests that the composition of Genesis 12:10 – 13:4 has been intentionally shaped to foreshadow the events of Israel's sojourn in Egypt.

If the similarities between these two narratives are not merely accidental, then it is clear that some sort of "narrative typology" lies behind their composition. The author wants to show that the events of the past are pointers to events still future. One interesting confirmation that this particular text was intended to be read in such a way is the role played by Lot within this narrative. It can hardly be accidental that Genesis 12:1 – 13:4, which forms the frontispiece to the Lot narratives, is virtually duplicated as a kind of *inclusio* in Genesis 20, which comes at the end of the last of the narratives dealing with Lot. This is especially noticeable in light of the fact that chapter 20 is both chronologically and geographically out of place in its narrative context. The positioning of the Lot narratives between these two remarkably similar narratives about Abraham is an important clue to the narrative strategy of these chapters.

Of special interest is the fact that in Genesis 12:10 – 13:4 Lot occupies the same position as that of the "mixed multitude" (ʿērēḇ [GK 6850], Ex 12:38; NIV,"other people") in the narrative of Genesis 41 – Exodus 12. The author thus draws the reader's attention to the identification of Lot with the "mixed multitude" (ʿērēḇ). Lot is treated as a prefiguration of the "mixed multitude" (ʿērēḇ) that comes out of Egypt with the Israelites.

Summary

The final shape of the Pentateuch reflects an interest in reading its historical narratives both typologically and futuristically. The events of the past are presented as pointers to the future. The future is portrayed as "like" the past. Second, the internal composition of smaller narrative units also reflects this same interest in typology and the future. As we will see, it is by this means that the "seed" of Abraham in the Genesis promise narratives is identified with the future redeemer-king of the poems in the Pentateuch.

5. LITERARY FORM

Aside from the poems in Genesis, the predominant literary form of the book is historical narrative. Historical narrative is the realistic re-presentation of past events for the purpose of instruction. Two dimensions are at work in shaping such narratives: (1) the course of the historical event itself and (2) the viewpoint of the author who recounts the event. This dual aspect of historical narrative means that one must not only look at the course of the event in its historical setting, but one must also look for the purpose and intention of the author in recounting the event.

Making sense of historical *events* is the task of a biblical historian. Making sense of historical narratives is the task of a good reader. These two quite different skills should not be confused. Our task in this commentary will not focus on the historian's work of making sense of the events to which these narratives refer.[16] Our task will be devoted to making sense of the written narratives in terms of the author's intention. What is the author attempting to tell us in these narratives? In what follows we will outline briefly some general principles as to how we will go about finding the author's intent and his purpose in recounting the Genesis narratives.

Assessing the Structure

The most influential yet subtle feature of an author's work in relating historical events is the overall framework within which he arranges his account. This could be called the literary "context." A more suitable term is the

“structure” of the passage. What this means is that there is always an internal relationship of each segment of a narrative to the other segments of the narrative and to the narrative viewed as a whole. When we speak of structure, we are speaking of “the total set of relationships within a given unit of narrative.”

General structural elements to look for in historical narrative are simple but nonetheless important. They include an introduction, a conclusion, sequence, disjuncture, repetition, deletion, description, and dialogue. These elements combine to form the building blocks of larger narrative units. For example, Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a is clearly recognizable as a unit of historical narrative. It has an introduction (1:1), a body (1:2 – 2:3), and a conclusion (2:4a). The combination of these three parts of narrative forms a single unit. Within this unit several structural elements combine to tie this passage together and give it a specific meaning. One of the more obvious elements is the repetition of the phrase “evening and morning,” which divides the passage into a seven-day schema. Creation is fit into a period of a single workweek concluding with a day of rest. Already in this simple structural framework one can see a tilting of the account in a direction that betrays the larger interests of the author — God’s work of creation is cast in terms that reflect humanity’s own everyday work.

Another, more subtle structural element tying the passage together is the sentence patterns (or sequence) within which the events of creation are recorded. This is apparent in the almost monotonous string of “and’s” in the early versions of chapter 1. In contrast to this seamless sequencing is an abrupt disjuncture at 1:2, in effect placing the events in this verse slightly outside the regular course of events in the chapter. A study of the author’s style in Genesis shows that when he wants to narrow his topic from the preceding subject matter, he uses such a technique of disjuncture.

Here, then, at the beginning of the account, the narrative structure betrays the aim of the author to narrow the scope of his narrative from the universe (1:1) to the land (1:2 – 31). This is quite a remarkable turning point in the account of creation and should not be overlooked by anyone attempting to follow closely the author’s intent. Structure implies purpose, and that in turn suggests a central concern or integration point that gives a passage its meaning and direction.

In the examples just cited, it is suggested that the central concern of Genesis 1

focuses on humanity and the land. We would need more than these two examples to be convinced that this is the central concern of the passage, but the cumulative effect of further observations suggests that this is the direction or purpose behind the framework of the account. When we have observed the internal structure of a passage, as we briefly have just done with Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a, we have by no means completed the task of assessing the total structural relationship of the passage to the broader context within which it is found. There may indeed be a series of further structural ties between the passage and its literary environment.

Here we are faced with the problem of where to fix the outside boundaries of a passage such as this within the historical narrative itself. It is often the case in the OT narratives that the division of the narrative into "books" cuts across tightly constructed segments. (For example, Genesis 1 – Exodus 1:7 is a structurally complete unit not recognized by those who divided the Pentateuch into five parts.) Beyond these literary units lie, as well, the larger borders of the OT canon and the subsequent canon of the Old and New Testaments.

In working with Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a, we can safely set our perimeters around the Pentateuch (Genesis – Deuteronomy) as the largest meaningful (literary) unit. Since it comes first, it also seems safe to say that Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a is to be considered an introduction to the Pentateuch. Once the largest unit of historical narrative has been drawn, a twofold task remains: (1) to determine the central concern of this unit and (2) to develop the contribution of the smaller unit (Ge 1:1 – 2:4) to the concern of the whole (the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch). The central concern of the largest unit of narrative is not always immediately apparent, but it can become clearer with a trial-and-error effort to relate the parts to the whole. This amounts, in practice, to reading through the entire unit and formulating a general statement of its overall theme. This theme is then checked against further readings of the text. Each reading should produce a clearer idea of the whole, which in turn casts further light on its parts or segments.

Since we have looked to the whole of the Pentateuch as the largest unit with a meaningful structural relationship to Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a, the question we can now ask is whether there is a single center to the Pentateuch. Is there a literary and theological center of gravity to the Pentateuch? As a point of departure, we suggest the central concern of the Pentateuch should be described as follows.

First, it should be observed that the most prominent event and the most far-reaching theme in the Pentateuch, viewed entirely on its own, is the covenant between God and Israel established at Mount Sinai. The meaning of this event as it is described in the Pentateuch can be summarized in the following cluster of themes: (1) God comes to dwell with his people; (2) the "seed of Abraham" is an individual coming king and a chosen people; (3) God gives his land to the promised "seed"; (4) "the seed," both as individuals and as a people, must obey God; (5) and only then will salvation come to the nations.

If we leave these ideas in their original dress, we find that they are clothed in the metaphor of the ancient Near Eastern monarch: God, the Great King, grants to his obedient vassal-prince the right to dwell in his land and promises protection from his enemies. Somewhat more generally, this cluster of ideas occurs under the term "kingdom of God." However we may state it, it is the rule of God among his people and within his creation that is the central concern of the Pentateuch.

Still more can be said about the intention of the author of the Pentateuch. We can say, for example, something about what he wishes to tell his readers about the covenant at Sinai. This can be summarized in the following points:

1. The author of the Pentateuch wants to draw a connecting link between God's original plan of blessing for humankind in creation (Ge 1:28) and God's establishment of a covenant with Abraham (Ge 15) and its intended fulfillment at Sinai (a theme that will be developed in the commentary).

Put simply, the author sees the covenant at Sinai as an initial step in the right direction of God's plan to restore divine blessing to humankind through the "seed" of Abraham (Ge 12:1 – 3; Ex 2:24).

2. The author of the Pentateuch wants to show that the covenant at Sinai failed to restore God's blessing to humankind because Israel, the immediate physical descendants of Abraham, failed at Sinai to trust God and to obey God's will.
3. The author of the Pentateuch wants further to show that God's promise to restore the blessing will ultimately succeed because none other than God ensures the obedience of Abraham's seed through a new covenant (Dt 29). By that covenant God will give them a new heart to engender their trust and obedience (Dt 30:6 – 10).

The outlook of the Pentateuch, then, can be described as “futuristic,” for it looks to the future, not the past or present, as the time when God’s faithful promise (blessing) will be fulfilled. From the author’s perspective, the past at Mount Sinai ended in failure. The message of the Pentateuch, however, is that there is still hope for the future: God’s people should trust and obey him and, like Abraham, trust (exercise faith) in his promises. Thus the primary subject matter of the Pentateuch is the promise of a “seed” of Abraham and its relationship to the Sinaitic covenant. The author sees God’s call of Abraham and the establishment of the covenant at Sinai as the central religious and theological concern of the book.

The aim of the Pentateuch, however, goes beyond this immediate concern. It casts the light of a promised “new covenant” across the pages of the rest of the OT. In a real sense, the Pentateuch as a book (a written text) is the author’s answer to the failure of the Sinaitic covenant, and at the same time the Pentateuch is the expression of the author’s hope in a new covenant, which he holds out to his readers as the only remaining means of receiving the blessings promised to Abraham. The Pentateuch, therefore, is both the author’s explanation of the place Sinai occupied in God’s plan and the lessons to be drawn from the experience of its failure.

It is also important to appreciate that while the Pentateuch is about the Sinaitic covenant, it is not the document of that covenant. The Pentateuch contains documents that were a part of the Sinaitic covenant (e.g., the Ten Commandments [Ex 20], the covenantal code [Ex 21 – 23], instructions for the tabernacle [Ex 25 – 31], and the laws concerning sacrifice [Lev 1 – 7]), but the Pentateuch as a literary document is fundamentally different from any one of those documents of the Sinaitic covenant. The Pentateuch is a document that casts its glance backward to the Sinaitic covenant and its failure and asks, “What happened?” In so doing it attempts to evaluate the Sinaitic covenant from the new perspective of a future covenant, one that is not identical with the Sinaitic covenant itself (Dt 29:1). Like the rest of the biblical historical books in the OT, the Prophets, and the NT, the Pentateuch represents both a look at the failure of Sinai and its future fulfillment (e.g., Dt 30).

This brings us to the question of the contribution of the smaller narrative units (e.g., Ge 1:1 – 2:4a) to the central concern of the whole (the Pentateuch). If we are correct in saying that Genesis 1 is an introduction to the Pentateuch, then we

should ask what it introduces about the Pentateuch's central concern, that is, what it introduces about the covenant at Sinai. The following principles are intended to demonstrate how a segment of historical narrative can contribute in this way to the central concern of the larger narrative of which it is a part.

The Principle of Selectivity

No historical narrative is a complete account of all that has occurred in a past event or series of events. The author must select those events that most effectively recount not only what happened but also the meaning and significance of what happened. We can formulate a working description of this principle of selection in this way: The author selects and arranges those features of a historical event that most characteristically portray the meaning of the event as he conceives it.

A close study of Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a shows that a careful and purposeful selection has been made in the composition of the creation account. The features selected are those that most clearly provide an introduction to the Sinaitic covenant. The creation account gives the reader the kind of information that makes the author's view of the Sinaitic covenant understandable.

One way to uncover the extent and focus of the selectivity in a passage such as Genesis 1 is to ask, What general features of creation (the subject matter) would one expect to find in Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a that are not found in the narrative? Where, for example, is the account of the creation of the angels? Where, for that matter, is the account of the creation of the stars and the galaxies? While it is true that the creation of these bodies is stated as a brute fact in v.1 and is briefly recalled in v.16, the chapter itself has little to say about them. The author has chosen rather to concentrate on the creation and preparation of the land, or earth.

If we judge from the limited subjects found in Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a, we can say that the author has only three specific topics in mind: God, humanity, and the land. But seeing that there is little mention of the creation of the rest of the universe in this chapter, we should notice that the creation of the sun and moon is given considerable attention. Yet neither of these celestial bodies is mentioned

in its own right. Rather, their creation is recounted in terms of the role they play in the affairs of humankind on the land: they are "to separate the day from the night, and . . . serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years" (1:14 – 15).

Structure and Selectivity Together

At this point it is helpful to show how the two principles of structure and selectivity work together to give meaning to a narrative. First, we have already noted that an internal structural element has defined the scope of the Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a creation account. That is, the disjuncture at 1:2 is used by the author to focus his creation account on the land (earth), that is, humankind's habitation. This is consistent with what our discussion of the selectivity of the passage attempted to show: one of the author's three specific topics is the land (earth).

We can now turn to the external structural relationship of Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a to the rest of the Pentateuch and ask: What does the land, or earth, as the subject matter of Genesis 1 have to do with the Sinaitic covenant? Or more precisely, how does what Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a records about the land (earth) serve as an introduction to the author's view of the covenant at Sinai? The answer to that question lies in the fact that when Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a speaks of God's creation and preparation of the land (earth), we are introduced to one of the central elements of the Sinaitic covenant, namely, God's promise of blessing in the land:"If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession among all the nations because all the land (earth) is mine" (Ex 19:5, my trans.).

What, then, does Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a tell us about the land? It tells us that God is its owner. It is his land (earth). He created and prepared the land (earth), and he can give it to whomever he pleases (cf. Jer 27:5). In the ancient world, the right to own land and grant it to others formed the basis of an ordered society. The author of the Pentateuch goes to considerable lengths to point out that the promise of the land to "the seed" of Abraham was at the heart of the Sinaitic covenant, even though it was a covenant that failed. Genesis 1 shows us that this was a promise which in every way was a right justly belonging to God.

Another example of the interrelationship between structure and selection can

be seen in the view of God in Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a. When viewed as an introduction (i.e., in its structural relationship) to the covenant at Sinai, we can see that Genesis 1 presents an important view of the covenantal God: he is the Creator of the universe (1:1). Because Israel through the covenant had come to know God in a close and personal way, a certain theological pressure existed that, if left unchecked, could — and at times did —erode a proper view of God. This pressure was the tendency to localize and nationalize God as the God of Israel alone (Mic 3:11) — a God who exists solely for Israel and for their blessing.

Over against such a view of God stands the message of Genesis 1 with its clear introduction of the God who created the universe and who has prepared a blessing for all humanity. From the point of view of the author of the Pentateuch, the God of the covenant is the Creator of the universe; and he has a plan of blessing for all the nations. The theological foundation of all subsequent missionary statements in the Bible meets us already in the first verse of the Bible. The Bible's understanding of salvation cannot properly be understood apart from the context and scope of "the heavens and earth" in Genesis 1:1.

We can thus conclude this section on the narrative shape of the Pentateuch with a summary of Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a. Here the author of the Pentateuch intends his creation account to inform his readers that God, the Creator of the universe, has prepared the land as a home for the creatures he knows as "humankind."

This is the God who has a plan of blessing for all humanity.

6. GENESIS AND THE FINAL SHAPE OF THE PRIMARY HISTORY

The compositional links between Deuteronomy 34 and Joshua 1 suggest the presence of a work much larger than the present Pentateuch. Indeed, there is some textual evidence that the Pentateuch has been intentionally expanded by linking it to the rest of the OT historical books to form a single work extending from Genesis through 2 Kings. If such a link exists, it follows that we should raise the question of the role Genesis may play as an introduction to that work.

The recognition of the possible existence of such a work has been the fruit of only very recent scholarship. Biblical scholars refer to the assumed work as the "Primary History" and view it as a kind of precursor to the books of Chronicles. Both works cover the same historical time span from Adam (Ge 1; 1Ch 1:1) to the return from Babylonian exile (2Ki 25:29 – 30 and 2Ch 36:22 – 23). As a whole they represent two complementary accounts of the same history.

Regarding the role of Genesis within the Primary History, one can speak only in general terms. Much work remains in charting the central lines of thought in such a history. Nevertheless, we can speak in ways that suggest a genuine effort was made by the early framers of the OT to read these large sections of text holistically. The pattern of attaching poems at the conclusion of segments of narrative, for example, continues throughout the Primary History. Deborah's poem (Jdg 5) and Hannah's psalm (1Sa 2:1 – 10) are examples of this, as is the placement of David's poem in 2 Samuel 22 and his "last words" in 23:1 – 7. The focus of these poems is both David in the short run of Israel's history and the "Messiah" in the long run (1Sa 2:10; 2Sa 22:51; 23:1).

Curiously, the narrative segment of the book of Kings that found its way into the book of Isaiah (Isa 38:9 – 20) also contains such a programatic poem, even though it is not included in that segment in the book of 2 Kings. Its role within the larger context of the Primary History and the prophetic books may have been taken over by Isaiah 2:1 – 4, which, in fact, contains the same "futuristic" introduction (the phrase, "in the last days") as the poems in the Pentateuch. This phrase in Isaiah 2 thus extends the range of "the beginning" in Genesis 1:1 and the "end of days" in the poems in the Pentateuch beyond the immediate events of Joshua and Kings and into the future invisioned by Isaiah's prophecy of the "new heavens and earth" (Isa 65:17).

That, at least, is how Isaiah appears to view it when he summarizes God's work of making "known the end from the beginning" (Isa 46:10). Isaiah's words are a suitable summary of the central themes of the Primary History. It is well known that this section of Isaiah lays a great deal of stress on viewing the future of God's promises in the light of the development of those promises within Genesis. A reading of these texts on such a grand scale opens a further question about the role of Genesis within the larger context of the entire Hebrew OT (Tanak).

7. GENESIS AND THE TANAK

Within the structure of the final shape of the Hebrew OT (Tanak), the last book in many important editions is Chronicles. Thus, the last words in Chronicles are the last words in the OT. They are the words spoken by the Persian king Cyrus (2Ch 36:22 – 23), and they, like the poems in Genesis and the Pentateuch, look forward to the coming of a promised royal "seed" from the house of David (1Ch 17:11 and 2Ch 36:22 – 23). This sets them in direct relationship to the central theme of the "coming king" in the poems of the Pentateuch. As in the Pentateuch and the prophets, the "beginning" of God's work in creation culminates "in the end" with the coming of Abraham's "seed," who, like David, is an individual from the house of Judah (Ge 49:8 – 12). With such thoughts, the framers of the Hebrew Bible close their edition of the OT. In so doing they appear to read the OT in much the same way as their NT counterparts, who begin their NT scriptures with Matthew's genealogy of Jesus as "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt 1:1).

What appears to be at work in this kind of shaping and placement of the books of the OT is a sensitivity to context that goes beyond a mere arrangement of texts to a genuine effort to view these texts holistically and within a specific theological framework. That, of course, is another way of saying that in the shaping and positioning of the books of the OT (Tanak), we are looking at a kind of early biblical theology of the OT.

In taking up the OT as part of their own, those who formed the NT were not free to read the OT however they saw fit. It was given to them in a kind of preinterpreted mode. It had a shape, and they were at least obliged to begin with that shape and ask what its framers wanted them to see in these texts from the perspective of that shape. This is precisely what we see the NT characters doing with the OT Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:44). Like biblical theologians, the framers of the Tanak were seeking to understand what the whole of the OT was about and how its individual pieces were to fit together. If, as is likely, such a concern existed at this early stage, one would be remiss in a commentary of this sort not to raise relevant theological questions about it.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1981 – 83.

9. OUTLINE

I. Introduction to the Patriarchs and the Sinaitic Covenant (1:1 – 11:26)

A. The Land and the Blessing (1:1 – 2:24)

1. The God of Creation (1:1)
2. Preparation of the Land (1:2 – 2:3)
a. First Day (1:2 – 5)
b. Second Day (1:6 – 8)
c. Third Day (1:9 – 13)
d. Fourth Day (1:14 – 19)
e. Fifth Day (1:20 – 23)
f. Sixth Day (1:24 – 31)
g. Seventh Day (2:1 – 3)
3. The Gift of the Land (2:4 – 24)
a. Creation of Man (2:4 – 7)
b. Preparation of the Garden (2:8 – 14)
c. Man's Place in the Garden (2:15 – 24)

B. The Land and the Exile (2:25 – 4:26)

1. Disobedience (2:25 – 3:7)
a. The Transition (2:25)
b. The Tempter (3:1)
c. The Temptation (3:2 – 7)
2. Judgment (3:8 – 20)
a. The Scene (3:8)
b. The Trial (3:9 – 13)
c. The Verdict (3:14 – 20)
3. Protection (3:21)
4. Exile (3:22 – 24)

C. Life in Exile (4:1 – 26)

1. Worship (4:1 – 8)

2. Repentance (4:9 – 15a)
3. Protection (4:15b – 24)
4. Blessing (4:25 – 26)

D. The Story of Noah (5:1 – 10:32)

1. Prologue (5:1 – 3)
2. The Sons of Adam (5:4 – 32)
3. Epilogue (6:1 – 4)
4. The Flood (6:5 – 9:17)
a. The Decree (6:5 – 12)
b. The Command to Build the Ark (6:13 – 22)
c. The Command to Enter the Ark (7:1 – 5)
d. The Flood (7:6 – 24)
e. The Flood Abates (8:1 – 14)
f. The Command to Exit the Ark (8:15 – 19)
g. The Altar and the Covenant (8:20 – 9:17)
5. Noah's Drunkenness (9:18 – 29)
6. The Line of Noah (10:1 – 32)
a. The Sons of Noah (10:1)
b. The Sons of Japheth (10:2 – 5)
c. The Sons of Ham (10:6 – 20)
d. The Sons of Shem (10:21 – 31)
e. Epilogue (10:32)
E. The City of Babylon (11:1 – 9)
F. The Line of Shem (11:10 – 26)

II. Abraham (11:27 – 25:10 [11])

A. The Line of Abraham (11:27 – 32)

B. The Call of Abraham (12:1 – 9)

C. Abraham in Egypt (12:10 – 13:4)

D. The Lot Narratives (13:5 – 19:38)

1. Abraham and Lot (13:5 – 18)
2. Abraham and the Nations (14:1 – 24)

3. Abraham and the Covenant (15:1 – 21)
a. Abraham's Vision (15:1 – 4)
b. Abraham's Descendants and His Faith (15:5 – 6)
c. Abraham's Future and His Covenant (15:7 – 21)
4. Hagar (16:1 – 16)
a. Abraham and Hagar (16:1 – 6)
b. Hagar and Ishmael (16:7 – 12)
c. Hagar and God (16:13 – 16)
5. Abraham, Sarah, and Ishmael (17:1 – 27)
a. Abraham's Covenant (17:1 – 2)
b. Abraham's Response and Sign (17:3 – 16)
c. Abraham's Response (17:17 – 18)
d. Abraham's Offspring (17:19 – 22)
e. Circumcision (17:23 – 27)
6. Three Visitors (18:1 – 33)
a. Abraham's Hospitality (18:1 – 8)
b. The Promise of a Son (18:9 – 15)
c. Sodom in the Balance (18:16 – 22)
d. Abraham's Intercession (18:23 – 33)
7. Lot and Sodom (19:1 – 38)
a. Two Angels at Sodom (19:1 – 14)
b. Lot's Deliverance (19:15 – 28)
c. Lot's Incest (19:29 – 38)

E. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1 – 18)

F. Abraham and Isaac (21:1 – 25:11)

1. The Birth of Isaac (21:1 – 7)
2. Hagar and Ishmael (21:8 – 21)
3. Abraham and Abimelech (21:22 – 34)
4. The Binding of Isaac (22:1 – 14)
5. The Angel of the Lord (22:15 – 19)
6. The Relatives of Abraham (22:20 – 24)
7. Machpelah and Sarah's Death (23:1 – 20)
8. A Bride for Isaac (24:1 – 67)
a. Abraham's Instructions (24:1 – 9)
b. The Servant's Journey (24:10 – 27)
c. Rebekah (24:28 – 49)

d. Rebekah’s Journey to Isaac (24:50 – 67)
9. Abraham’s Death (25:1 – 10 [11])

III. The Account of Ishmael (25:12 – 18)

IV. The Account of Isaac (25:19 – 35:29)

A. The Birth of Jacob and Esau (25:19 – 28)

B. Selling the Birthright (25:29 – 34)

C. Isaac and Abimelech (26:1 – 35)

D. The Stolen Blessing (27:1 – 40)

E. Jacob’s Flight From Beersheba (27:41 – 28:5)

F. Esau’s Bitterness (28:6 – 9)

G. Jacob at Bethel (28:10 – 22)

H. Jacob and Rachel (29:1 – 14a)

I. Jacob’s Marriages (29:14b – 30)

J. The Birth of Jacob’s Sons (29:31 – 30:24)

K. Jacob and Laban’s Sheep (30:25 – 43)

L. Jacob’s Flight From Laban (31:1 – 21)

M.Jacob Overtaken by Laban (31:22 – 55)

N. Jacob’s Meeting With Angels (32:1 – 2)

O. Messengers Sent to Esau (32:3 – 22)

P. Jacob’s Wrestling Match (32:23 – 32)

Q. Jacob’s Meeting With Esau (33:1 – 17)

R. Jacob at Shechem (33:18 – 34:31)

S. Jacob’s Return to Bethel (35:1 – 15)

T. Benjamin’s Birth and Rachel’s Death (35:16 – 20)

U. The Sons of Jacob (35:21 – 26)

V. The Death of Isaac (35:27 – 29)

V. The Account of Esau (36:1 – 43)

A. Esau’s Journey to Seir (36:1 – 8)

B. Esau in Seir (36:9 – 43)

1. The Sons of Esau (36:9 – 19)
2. The Sons of Seir the Horite (36:20 – 30)
3. Rulers in Edom (36:31 – 43)

VI. The Account of Jacob (37:1 – 49:33)

A. Jacob in the Land (37:1)

B. Joseph’s Dreams (37:2 – 11)

C. Joseph’s Journey to Egypt (37:12 – 36)

D. Judah and Tamar (38:1 – 30)

E. Joseph in the House of Potiphar (39:1 – 23)

F. Joseph in Jail (40:1 – 23)

G. Joseph's Interpretation of Pharaoh's Dreams (41:1 – 36)

H. Joseph's Exaltation over Egypt (41:37 – 57)

I. Joseph's Brothers in Egypt (42:1 – 28)

J. Joseph's Brothers Return for Benjamin (42:29 – 38)

K. Joseph's Identity (43:1 – 45:28)

1. The Second Trip to Egypt (43:1 – 34)
2. The Silver Cup (44:1 – 34)
3. Joseph's Revelation (45:1 – 28)

L. Jacob's Journey to Egypt (46:1 – 7)

M.Jacob's Sons in Egypt (46:8 – 27)

N. Settling in Goshen (46:28 – 47:12)

O. Joseph's Rule in Egypt (47:13 – 27)

P. Jacob's Deathbed (47:28 – 49:33)

1. Jacob's Burial Instructions (47:28 – 31)
2. Ephraim and Manasseh Blessed (48:1 – 22)
3. Jacob's Sons Blessed (49:1 – 28)
4. Jacob's Burial Instructions Repeated (49:29 – 33)

Q. Jacob’s Death and Burial (50:1 – 14)

VII. The Final Joseph Narrative (50:15 – 26)

A. Joseph’s Forgiveness (50:15 – 21)

B. Summary of Joseph’s Life and Death (50:22 – 26)

1. Commentaries on Genesis often point to the recurring phrase,“These are the generations,” as a structural clue to the book of Genesis. If one is looking only at the book of Genesis and not *the Pentateuch as a whole*, there may be some merit in following the structure generated by that phrase. However, apart from Numbers 3:1, this phrase does not extend beyond Genesis or what we have come to understand as “the book of Genesis.” In reality, the first part of the Pentateuch is just that—the first part of the Pentateuch. It is not an independent book as such. The fact that the “generations” formula takes us only as far as Numbers 3 and not to the end of the Pentateuch strongly suggests it is not an essential structural element, at least for the whole of the Pentateuch, if not for Genesis. Our focus in this commentary on Genesis is the Pentateuch as a whole, not merely the first part of it. There are plenty of compositional strategies that link Genesis to the whole of the Pentateuch, and we will seek to understand Genesis in the light of those strategies.

An additional feature that suggests the author of the Pentateuch has not attached a great deal of importance to the “generations” phrase as a major structural pattern is the fact that its distribution within Genesis does not include Abraham, one of the central characters of the Pentateuch. To be sure, Abraham is included in the “generations of Terah” (Ge 11:27), but that is not the same as a “generation of Abram,” which is not in Genesis. As we will suggest in the commentary on 11:27, one must seek to explain, in light of the composition of the whole of the Pentateuch, why Abraham does not have a “generation.” That question is just as important as the question of why the other patriarchs, including Moses and Aaron (Nu 3:1), are assigned a “generation.”The absence of such a phrase in Abraham’s case is just as important as the presence of one for Moses and Aaron (see commentary on Ge 11:27).

2. Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *A Commentary Critical,*

Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), xxxii; cf. Roland de Vaux, *The Early History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 316.

3. See James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), 18–22 (The Story of Si-Nuhe).

4. See William Foxwell Albright, *The Proto-Sinaitic Inscriptions and Their Decipherment* (HTS 22; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969).

5. George Fohrer, *Exegesis des Alten Testaments, Einführung in die Methodik* (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1976),135–46; Rolf Rendtorff, *Das Alte Testament, Eine Einführung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1983), ix–x.

6. John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 35–37.

7. Ibid., 47–59.

8. Ibid., 471–79.

9. John H. Sailhamer,"The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," *JETS* 30 (September 1987): 307ff.; idem, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *WTJ* 53 (1991): 241–61.

10. For a helpful discussion of the concept of "levels" within a biblical narrative text see Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative," *VT* 30 (1980): 154–73.

11. Siegfried J. Schmidt, *Texttheorie, Probleme einer Linguistik der sprachlichen Kommunikation* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1976), 150.

12. Otto Eissfeldt, "Die kleinste literarische Einheit in den Erzähungsbüchern des Alten Testaments," in *Kleine Schriften*, vol. 1 (eds. Rudolf Sellheim and

Fritz Maass;Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1962), 143–49.

13. B. W. Anderson (*JBL* 97 [1978]: 38), quoted by Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, (WBC 1; Waco,Tex.:Word, 1987), 156.

14. See also Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch*, 35–37.

15. The material presented in this section can be found in an expanded form in the author's article, "The Canonical Approach to the OT: Its Effect on Understanding Prophecy," 307ff.

16. See my books *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998) and *Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).

Text and Exposition

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PATRIARCHS AND THE SINAITIC COVENANT (1:1 – 11:26)

OVERVIEW

We have suggested that chs. 1 – 11 form an introduction to the book of Genesis, the Pentateuch as a whole, the Primary History (Ge 1:1 – 2Ki 25:30), and the OT as a whole (Tanak). We should read these chapters with that purpose in mind. They thus set the stage for the narratives of the patriarchs (Ge 12 – 50) as well as provide the appropriate context for understanding the central topic of the Pentateuch: the Sinaitic covenant (Exodus – Deuteronomy); the Primary History: the Davidic kingship and its future (Joshua – 2 Kings); and the OT canon: blessing to the nations through the coming Davidic king.

Indeed a close reading of the early chapters of Genesis suggests that the author of the Pentateuch has thoughtfully selected and arranged the material in Genesis 1 – 11 to serve as an introduction, at least to the Pentateuch but perhaps also beyond that literary unit. Whether intended or not, the layout of Genesis 1 – 11 serves remarkably well as an introduction to the Primary History and the whole of the OT canon. The scope and magnitude of the events in the Primary History and the words of the prophets lose a good deal of their gravity if we read them outside the range of Genesis 1 – 11.

Behind the present shape of these narratives lies a clear theological program. In nearly every section of the work, the author's theological interest can be seen. His theological perspective might be summarized in two points: (1) the author draws a line connecting the God of the fathers and the God of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants with the God who created the world; and (2) the author shows that the call of the patriarchs and the Sinaitic covenant have as their

ultimate goal the reestablishment of God's original purpose in creation. In a word, the biblical covenants are marked off as the way forward to a new covenant and a new creation.

A. The Land and the Blessing (1:1 – 2:25)

OVERVIEW

A close look at the narrative style of the opening chapters of Genesis suggests that the first two chapters form a single unit of narrative. This unit has three primary sections. The first section is 1:1, which stands apart from the rest of ch. 1. The remaining two sections are 1:2 – 2:3 and 2:4b – 25. The heading *tôl^{e}dôt* ("generations"; NIV,"the account of ") in 2:4a serves to connect these last two sections. Two primary themes dominate the creation account: the creation and preparation of the world and the promise of divine blessing. In recounting the events of creation, the author has selected and arranged the narrative so that these themes are merged into a single theme given full development.

The twin theme of the creation and preparation of the world as the place of divine "blessing" is important to the author of Genesis (and the Pentateuch) because both themes form the basis for the treatment of the patriarchal narratives and the Sinaitic covenant. "Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely" (von Rad, 45).

1. The God of Creation (1:1)

[1]In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

COMMENTARY

1 The account opens with a clear, concise statement about the Creator and the creation. Its simplicity belies the depth of its content. These seven Hebrew words

are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible. The purpose of the statement is threefold: to identify the Creator, to explain the origin of the world, and to tie the work of God in the past to the work of God in the future.

The Creator is identified in 1:1 as “God,” that is, “Elohim” (ʾĕlōhîm). Although God is not further identified in v.1 (cf. 15:7; Ex 20:2), the author appears confident that there will be no mistaking God with any other than the God of the patriarchs and the God of the covenant at Sinai. The proper context for understanding this verse, in other words, is the whole of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch. Already in Genesis 2:4b, God (Elohim) is identified with the Lord (Yahweh), the God who called Abraham (12:1) and delivered Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:15).

From the perspective of the Pentateuch as a whole, the God in Genesis 1:1 is the God who has promised the patriarchs a good “earth” (ʾereṣ) and has redeemed them from Egypt. He is the “shepherd . . . deliverer” of Jacob’s blessing in 48:15 – 16. The purpose of 1:1 is not to identify God as such, but to identify him as the Creator of both the universe and the “earth,” which is the place of divine blessing.

It is not difficult to detect a polemic against idolatry behind the words of 1:1. By identifying God as the Creator, a crucial distinction is introduced between the God of the patriarchs and the gods of the nations — gods that to the biblical authors were mere idols. God alone created the heavens and the earth. The sense of 1:1 is similar to the message relayed to Jeremiah: “Tell them this,” Jeremiah said: “‘These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens’ ” (Jer 10:11). Also Psalm 96:5 shows that the full impact of Genesis 1:1 was appreciated by later biblical writers: “For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD [Yahweh] made the heavens.”

The statement in 1:1 not only identifies the Creator, it also explains the origin of the world. According to the sense of 1:1 (see Notes), the narrative states that God created all that exists. As it stands, the statement is an affirmation that God alone is eternal and that everything else owes its origin and existence to him. The influence of this verse is reflected in the thoughts found throughout the work of later biblical writers (e.g., Ps 33:6; Jn 1:3; Heb 11:3).

Equally important in 1:1 is the meaning of the phrase “in the beginning” (*bᵉrēʾšît*), especially within the framework of the creation account and the book of Genesis. The term “beginning” (*rēʾšît*; GK 8040) in biblical Hebrew marks the starting period of a measured frame of time, as in “the beginning of the year” (*rēʾšît haššānâ*; Dt 11:12). The conclusion of that period is called “the end” (*ʾaḥᵃrît*; GK 344), as in Deuteronomy 11:12: “the end of the year” (*ʾaḥᵃrît šānâ*, lit. trans.; H.-P. Muller, *THAT*, 709). The “beginning” denoted by *rēʾšît* is not a momentary point of time but a time period. The length or duration of the period is not specified by the term.

In biblical texts that speak of a king’s reign, the first part of the reign is usually not counted as part of the length of his reign. Hence, in calculating the duration of a king’s reign, only the years of his reign after an initial period of time, a “beginning”(*rēʾšît*), were counted. The duration of this period was sometimes only a few months but sometimes as long as several years. In either case, the reckoning of a king’s reign was preceded by a notation of an initial duration of time called “the *beginning* of his reign” (cf. Jer 28:1).

If we take into consideration the author’s choice of words for “the beginning,” the text appears to be telling us in 1:1 that God created the universe “during an unspecified length of time.” That indefinite period of time was followed by a single seven-day week. By placing the creation of the universe (“heavens and earth”) within the (*rēʾšît*) of Genesis 1:1, the writer refuses to identify the length of creation with the seven-day week that followed.

By commencing his history with a “beginning” (*rēʾšît*), a word often paired with “the end” (*ʾaḥᵃrît*), the author also prepares the way for the consummation of that history at “the end of time,” *ʾaḥᵃrît*.. “Already in Genesis 1:1 the concept of ‘the last days’ fills the mind of the reader” (Procksch, 425).

The growing focus within the biblical canon on the “last days” (*ʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*) is an appropriate extension of the “end” (*ʾaḥᵃrît*) already anticipated in the “beginning” (*rēʾšît*) of Genesis 1:1. The fundamental principle reflected in 1:1 and the prophetic vision of the future times of the “end” in the rest of Scripture is that the “last things will be like the first things” (Ernst Boklen, *Die Verwandtschât der jüdisch-christlichen mit der Parsischen Eschatologie* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902], 136): “Behold, I will create new

heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:17); "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1). The allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 in Revelation 22 illustrate the role these early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of the scriptural vision of the future (*ʾaḥᵃrîthaggᵉmālîm*).

NOTE

1 As noted above, the Hebrew word רֵאשִׁית (*rēʾšît*, GK 8040), "beginning," refers to an extended but unspecified duration of time. It is a period of time that precedes an extended series of time periods. It is a "time before time." In Job 8:7, for example, Job's *rēʾšît* is the early part of his life, before his misfortunes overtook him. During that time Job grew into full manhood, raised his family, and gained renown for his wisdom and prosperity. Job's *rēʾšît* was an unspecified but lengthy period in his life.

Within Genesis, the author uses the term *rēʾšît* for the early part of Nimrod's kingdom, "the beginning [*reì,šît*] of his kingdom was Babel . . ." (Ge 10:10 NASB). The NIV translates *rēʾšît* in that verse as "the first centers [*rēʾšît*] of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. . . ."

No one knows for certain the origin of this system of reckoning, but we know it was practiced throughout the ancient Near East. The writer of Genesis uses the same system of reckoning a seven-day week and precedes it by an indefinite period of time he calls the "beginning" (*rēʾšît*). The general chronological framework of the first chapter is illustrated in the following chart:



On the basis of "style and content," Wenham, 5, sets 1:1 – 2:3 apart from the following narratives (chs. 2:4 – 3:24) and makes it "an overture to the whole work" (v.1). This explanation, based as it is on a source-critical conclusion (style and content), misses the point that in the final shape of the text Genesis 1:1ff. is closely linked to what follows.

Wenham suggests that 2:1 – 3 is a chiastic inclusio to 1:1 by isolating the three expressions from 1:1 in 2:1 – 3, that is, "heaven and earth" (Ge 2:1), "God"

(2:2), and “created” (2:3). If this were intended, we might have expected the events of the seventh day (2:1 – 3) to repeat those of the first day (creation of light) rather than what apparently preceded the first day in 1:1 – 2. Not only is the symmetry off, but also the content of 2:1 – 3 does not closely parallel 1:1. The title phrase in 2:4a has more the kind of verbal repetition from 1:1 that might be expected for an inclusio: “heavens and earth,” followed (chiastically) by “when they were created.” (Wenham, 49, acknowledges this point.) As such, Wenham connects 2:4a with 2:4bff. rather than with the conclusion to 1:1ff., as do most commentaries.

Wenham’s paralleling of days one through three and four through six overlooks the seventh day, which is clearly the focus of the narrative. He acknowledges this and takes it to be a way of setting the seventh day apart both formally and materially (rest vs. work). The parallel pattern, however, is not very well formed. The second day’s creation of the sky parallels the creation of the birds on day five, but not the fish, which seem to parallel the seas of water created on the third day. Yet day six does not have fish — only land animals and human beings. Thus:

Day 1 Light	Day 4 Luminaries
Day 2 Sky	Day 5 Birds
Day 3 Water	Day 5 Fish, water creatures
Land	Day 6 Animals and humans
Fruit trees	Fruit trees, green shrubs

The interpretation given to v.1 rests on the traditional reading of בְּרֵאשִׁית (*bᵊrēʾšît*) in the absolute state rather than the construct state. A strong case, however, can be made for reading the phrase as a construct and subordinating v.1 to vv.2 – 3: “When God set about to create the heavens and the earth — the world being then a formless waste. . . .” For a complete exploration of this issue, see the first edition of this Genesis commentary (21 – 23).

Indications within Genesis suggest that the author intentionally chose רֵאשִׁית (*rēʾšît*) in v.1 because of its close association with אַחֲרִית (*ʾaḥᵃrît*) and thus had the “end” in view when he wrote of the “beginning.” For example, *rēʾšît* as an adverbial of time meaning “beginning” or “first” occurs only in v.1 in the Pentateuch (Ge 10:10 — substantival, not temporal). Elsewhere in the Pentateuch the author uses בַּתְּחִלָּה (*batᵗḥillâ* “at the first”; four times, all in Genesis:

13:3; 41:21; 43:18, 20) and בָּרִאשֹׁנָה (*bāriʾšonâ*, "at the first"; ten times, three in Genesis: 13:4; 28:19; 38:28). Both *tḥillâ* and *riʾšōnâ* differ from *rēʾšît* in that they mark a "beginning" of a series in opposition to the "second" or "next" member of the series (see 13:3 – 4). *Rēʾšît*, however, marks a "beginning" in opposition to the "end" *ʾaḥărît*; cf. Job 8:7; 42:12; Ecc 7:8; Isa 46:10).

If the author had wanted only to say that the heavens and the earth were created first in a series, he would have used *bāriʾšōnâ*. The use of *rēʾšît* in 1:1 strongly suggests that the author is motivated by its association with *ʾaḥărît*. If that is so, it suggests that an intentional anticipation of the "end" (*ʾaḥărît*) lies behind the author's choice of the word "beginning." In other words, the author's depiction of creation is governed by a futuristic anticipation of the "end" (*ʾaḥărît*) described in the Pentateuch's poetic texts.

Another indication that *rēʾšît* was used for its association with *ʾaḥărît* comes from a consideration of the structure of Genesis and the Pentateuch. As noted in the Introduction: Compositional Shape of the Pentateuch, in the narrative style of much of the Pentateuch, the conclusions of minor and major units are marked by poetic texts followed by a brief epilogue. On these stylistic grounds, the conclusion of the book of Genesis is found in chs. 49 – 50, and the conclusion of the Pentateuch is Deuteronomy 32 – 34. Both narratives consist of poetic texts with an epilogue. In both of these "conclusions," the poetic texts are framed by a short prologue (Ge 49:1; Dt 31:28 – 30) in which the "patriarch" (Jacob and Moses) called together the "elders" (Ge 49:1; Dt 31:28) and spoke his final words to them (cf. O. Eissfeldt, "Die Umrah-mung des Mose-Liedes Dtn 32, 1 – 43 und des Mose-Gesetzes Dtn 1 – 30 in Dtn 31, 9 – 32, 47," *Kleine Schrîten* [Tulbingen: Mohr, n.d.], 3:322ff.).

The function of both prologues is to situate the poetic texts within the framework of the future (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrîthayyāmîm*, Ge 49:1c; Dt 31:29; NIV, "in days to come"). It is not important at this juncture whether the *ʾaḥărît* is intended to be read as eschatological (Hugo Gressmann, *Der Messias* [Göttingen:Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1929], 223) or historical (Joseph Klausner, *The Messianic Idea in Israel* [London: Allen and Unwin, 1956], 30). The important point is that the author of Genesis turns directly to the theme and terminology of "the end times" (*ʾaḥărît*) when he draws his narrative to a close in Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole.

If the use of *ʾaḥărît* is intentional at the conclusion of these narratives, which appears to be the case, then it is likely that the use of *rēʾšît* is intentional at the beginning of the narrative. Thus it seems apparent that *rēʾšît* in 1:1 is intended to introduce into the "beginning" an anticipation of the "end." Thus in consciously grounding the future in the past, the author of Genesis follows a "fundamental principle" in biblical eschatology: the last things are like the first things (Boklen, *Die Verwandtschât*, 136).

The phrase הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ (*haššāmayim wᵉʾet hāʾāreṣ*, "the heavens and the earth") is a figure of speech (merism) for the expression of "totality." Its use in the Bible appears to be restricted to the totality of the present world order and is equivalent to the "all things" in Isaiah 44:24 (cf. Ps 103:19; Jer 10:16). Particularly important to notice is that its use elsewhere in Scripture suggests that the phrase includes the sun and the moon as well as the stars (e.g., Joel 3:15 – 16). They were all created "in the beginning."

2. Preparation of the Land (1:2 – 2:3)

OVERVIEW

As a praise of God's grace, the theme of the remainder of the creation account (1:2 – 2:25) is God's gift of the "world" to humankind. First, God prepared the land for humankind by dividing the waters and furnishing its resources (1:2 – 27). Then he gave the land and its resources to his creatures as the place of divine blessing. The gift of the land was then safeguarded by a call for obedience (2:16 – 17).

A similar pattern is reflected in the psalm of Moses in Exodus 15:1 – 18 and in the poem in Deuteronomy 32. In both texts the author draws a connection between God's gracious work of creation and his gracious covenant with humanity. In Deuteronomy 32, for example, the author uses terminology clearly reminiscent of Genesis 1. He portrays God's loving care for Israel and all humanity over against their chronic disobedience. In these central poems in the Pentateuch, the loss of the land, which was to come in a future exile, is portrayed

as the inevitable result of a foolish lack of appreciation for God's gracious and loving provisions. Throughout the early chapters of Genesis the viewpoint reflected in these poems of Moses (Ex 15 and Dt 32) plays a major role in the theological shaping of the narratives.

a. First day (1:2 – 5)

> [2]Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.
> [3]And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. [4]God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. [5]God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning —the first day.

COMMENTARY

2 a Verse 2 describes the condition of the world before God prepared it for human beings. The sense of the phrase "formless and empty" (*tōhû wābōhû*) must be gained from the context. The immediate context (vv.2a, 9) suggests that the land was described as "formless and empty" because there was "darkness" over the land and because the land was covered with water. The general context of ch. 1 suggests, however, that the author meant the terms "formless and empty" to describe, in a narrow sense, the condition of the land *before* God made it "good." Before God began his work, the land was "formless" (*tōhû*; GK 9332); God then made it "good" (*tôb*). Thus "formless and empty" ultimately refers to the condition of the land in its "not yet" state. In this sense the description of the land in 1:2 is similar to that in 2:5 – 6. Both describe the land as "not yet" what it would later come to be.

In light of the fact that the remainder of ch. 1 pictures God's preparing of the land as a place where humankind will dwell, we would expect v.2 to focus our attention on the land as not yet habitable for humankind. Having described the land as uninhabitable, the remainder of the account pictures God's preparing of the land for his creatures, especially humankind. He makes it fit for their habitation. The meaning of the word *tōhû* is thus closer to its use in Isaiah 45:18, which states that "[God] did not create it [the land] to be empty [*tōhû*], but formed it to be inhabited." The term "empty" (*tōhû*) in the Isaiah passage stands in

opposition to the phrase “to be inhabited.”

This is also the meaning of *tōhû* in Deuteronomy 32:10. There “formless” (*tōhû*) is parallel to terms for “desert” (*midbār*) — an uninhabitable wasteland. This passage depicts Israel’s time of waiting for forty years in the wilderness — before their entry into the land. The prophets draw from the same source to depict God’s judgment of exile. When Israel disobeyed God, the land (*hā’āreṣ*) becomes again “uninhabitable” (*tōhû*), and the people are sent into exile. Jeremiah said,“I looked at the earth, and it was formless and empty [*tōhû wābōhû*] and at the heavens and their light was gone . . . the fruitful land was a desert” (Jer 4:23 – 26).

The *land* in the exile is thus depicted in its initially created state — that is, as it was before God’s preparation of it during this six-day week of making the land a fit place for humanity’s habitation. Thus the description of the land in Genesis 1:2 fits in well with the prophetic vision of the future. The land lies empty, dark, and barren, awaiting God’s call to light and life. Just as the light of the sun broke in upon the primeval darkness heralding the dawn of God’s first blessings (1:3), so the prophets and apostles mark the beginning of a future new age of salvation with the light that pierces the nighttime darkness (Isa 8:22 – 9:2; Mt 4:13 – 17; Jn 1:5, 8 – 9).

These same ideas are already at work in the composition of Genesis 1. Just as the future messianic salvation will be marked by a flowering of the desert (Isa 35:1 – 2), so also God’s final acts of salvation are foreshadowed in the flowering of creation in this early week. The wilderness awaits God’s words of blessing and its own anticipated restoration. Henceforth the call to prepare for the coming day of salvation will be heard by those yet waiting in the wilderness — a common prophetic vision of the future (Isa 40:3; Mk 1:4 – 5; Rev 12:6, 14 – 15).

2b The second part of v.2 has received remarkably diverse interpretations. The question is whether the last clause in the verse (“The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters”) belongs with the first two clauses and hence further describes the state of the uninhabitable land (e.g., “a mighty wind”), or whether it belongs to the following verse (3) and thus describes an anticipated work of God, or the Spirit of God, in the initial stages of creation.

Though some modern versions have interpreted the clause as “a mighty wind,” the traditional reading “Spirit of God” is the only reading compatible with the verb “hovering” (*m$_e$rah.epet*), a verb not suited to describing the blowing of a wind. The image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters is recalled in Deuteronomy 32:11 by the metaphor of God as an eagle “hovering” (*y$_e$rah.eìp*) over the nest of its young, protecting and making their nest fit for them. The use of this similar divine imagery both at the beginning of the Pentateuch and at its end suggests a picture of the work of the divine Spirit in both passsages.

The identity of the “Spirit of God” in v.2 finds additional suppport in the parallels between the creation account (Ge 1) and the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus. Many lines of comparison can be drawn between the two accounts, showing that the writer intended a thematic identity between the two narratives. Here it will suffice to note that in both accounts the work of God (*mᵉlāʾkâ*, Ge 2:2; Ex 31:5) is to be accomplished by means of the “Spirit of God” (*rûaḥ ʾᵉlōhîm*) . As God did his “work” (*mᵉlāʾkâ*) of creation by means of the “Spirit of God” (*rûaḥ ʾᵉlōhîm*) so Israel was to do their “work” (*mᵉlāʾkâ*) by means of the “Spirit of God.” The theme of the work of the Spirit of God is part of the Pentateuch’s focus on the new covenant (see Sailhamer, 471 – 75).

3 – 5 Verse 3 is often taken to mean that God created light before he created the sun, since here he says, “Let there be light,” but only in v.16 does the narrative speak of God as making the sun. It should be noted, however, that the sun, moon, and stars are included in the meaning of the Hebrew expression in v.1, “heavens and the earth” (*haššāmayimurʾhāʾāreṣ*) The expression is used in the Bible in a general way for the universe as we know it today. According to this account the sun, moon, and stars were created in v.1.

Verse 3 does not describe the creation of the sun but the appearance of the sunlight in the darkness of the night, which precedes the dawning of the first day of this momentous week (cf. the sunrise as described in 44:3; Ex 10:23; Ne 8:3). The Hebrew word for “light” (*ʾôr*) in each of those passages refers to the sunlight, which is the word’s most likely sense in Genesis 1:3 as well. The narrative does not explain the cause of the darkness in v.2, just as it does not explain the cause of the darkness in the land of Egypt in Exodus 10:22. It is probably to be understood as the darkness of night. The week thus begins with the sunrise in

v.3, “and there was light.” The absence of an explicit explanation of the darkness is insufficient ground for assuming the sun had not yet been created (see further on 1:14 – 18).

According to Wenham, 19, “There can be little doubt that here ‘day’ has its basic sense of a 24-hour period. The mention of morning and evening, the enumeration of the days, and the divine rest on the seventh show that a week of divine activity is being described here.” Such a natural explanation of this text finds ready support in the notice of a division between “the day” and “the night” already in v.4. This leaves little room for an interpretation of the “light” in v.3 as anything other than sunlight.

In light of the frequent repetition of the phrase, “And God saw that it was good” (vv.4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), we may assume that this is an element the narrative intends to emphasize. In view of such an emphasis at the beginning of the book, it is hardly accidental that throughout Genesis and the Pentateuch, the activity of “seeing” is continually put at the center of the author’s conception of God. The first name given to God within the book is that of Hagar’s: “El Roi” (אֵל רֳאִי) “the seeing God” (16:13). The psalmist, in reflecting on these texts, recognizes God’s “seeing” as one of the essential attributes distinguishing him from all false idols, “which do not see” (Ps 115:5).

Also, in Genesis 22:1 – 19, a central chapter dealing with the identity of God in Genesis, the narrative concludes on the theme that God is the one who “sees.” Thus the place where the Lord appeared to Abraham is called, “The LORD will see” (22:14). (Though the early versions often translate the verb “to see” in this passage as “to provide,” as it should be, the Hebrew word רָאָה[“to see”] only comes to mean “to provide” secondarily [cf. *TWOT*, 823].)

This close connection between “seeing” and “providing” likely plays an important role in the sense of the verb “to see” in ch. 1. In a tragic reversal of the portrayal of God’s “seeing” the “good” in creation, the author subsequently returns to the notion of God’s “seeing” at the opening of the account of the flood. Here too the biblical God is the God who “sees”; but at that point in the narrative, after the fall, God no longer “saw” the “good” (רָאָה טוֹב), but he “saw how great man’s wickedness [רָעָה] on the earth had become” (6:5). The verbal parallels suggest that the two narratives are to be read as a contrast of the state of

humanity before and after the fall (O. Eissfeldt, “Die kleinste literarische Einheit in den Erzählungsbuchern des Alten Testaments,” in *Kleine Schrîten*, vol. 1 [Tulbingen: Mohr, 1962], 144).

The “good” the author has in view has a specific range of meaning in ch. 1 — the “good” is that which is *beneficial* for humanity. Notice, for example, that in the description of the work of the second day (vv.6 – 8), the narrative does not say, “God saw that it was good.” The reason for the omission is that on day two there was nothing created or made that was, as yet, “good”— that is, beneficial to humanity. The heavens were made and the waters divided, but the land, where humankind was to dwell, remains hidden under the “deep.”The land is still *tōhû*; it is not yet a place where humankind can live. Only when, on the third day, the sea is parted and the dry land appears does the text inform us, “God saw it was good” (v.10). Only when the land is prepared for humankind can God call it good.

Throughout this opening chapter God is depicted as the one who both knows what is “good” for humankind and is intent on providing the good for humanity. In this way the author has prepared the reader for the tragedy that awaits in ch. 3. It is in the light of an understanding of God as the one who discerns “good” (*ṭôb*) from “evil” (*raʿ*), and who is intent on providing humanity with the good, that humankind’s rebellious attempt to gain the knowledge of “good and evil” for themselves can be seen clearly for the folly that it is. The author seems intent on portraying the “fall” not merely as sin but also as the work of fools.

When we read the portrayal of God in ch. 1 as the Provider of all that is good and beneficial (*wayyarʾ ʾĕlōhîm kî-ṭôb*, “And God saw that it was good”), we cannot help but see in this an anticipation of the author’s depiction of the hollowness of that first rebellious thought: “The woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good [*ṭôb*] . . . and also desirable for gaining wisdom” (3:6). Here again the verbal parallels between God’s “seeing [of] the good” in ch. 1 and the woman’s “seeing [of] the good” in ch. 3 can hardly be unintended in the text. In drawing a parallel between the woman’s “seeing” and God’s “seeing,” the author submits a graphic picture of the limits of human wisdom and, by doing so, highlights the tragic irony of the fall.

NOTES

2 The English translation of תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ (*tōhû wābōhû*)as “formless and empty” (NIV), or “without form and void” (RSV), often leads to an understanding of the description of the earth as a chaotic, amorphous mass, rather than calling to mind an uninhabitable stretch of wasteland, a wilderness not yet inhabitable for humans, as is suggested here in Genesis 1. At a popular level, this translation is likely to conjure images of the earth and the universe in its primeval stages, much as the view of the origin of the universe in the physical sciences conjures images of a mass of cooling gases whirling through space (e.g., “an original formless matter in the first stage of the creation of the universe,” *The New Scofield Bible*, 1). Though such a picture might find support in the English expession “without form and void,” it is not an image connoted by the Hebrew *tōhû wābōhû*.

The origin of the English translation is to be found in the ancient Greek version (LXX), that translated *tōhû* with ἀόρατος(*aoratos*, “unseen”) and *wābōhû* with ἀκατασκεύαστος(*akataskeuastos*, “unformed”). Since both terms played an important role in the Hellenistic cosmologies at the time of the translation, most likely the choice of these terms, and others within the LXX of Genesis 1, was motivated by an attempt to harmonize the biblical account with accepted cosmologies of that day rather than by adhering strictly to the sense of the Hebrew text (Armin Schmitt, “Interpretation der Genesis aus hellenistischem Geist,” *ZAW* 86 [1974]: 150 – 51).

It is of special interest that the later Greek versions — e.g., Aquila (“empty and nothing”), Symmachus (“fallow and indistinct”) — move decidedly away from the LXX. It is also important to note that the early Semitic versions have no trace of the concepts found in the LXX; e.g., *Tg. Neof. I* appropriately paraphrases *tōhû wābōhû* as “desolate without human beings or beast and void of all cultivation of plants and of trees.” The Vulgate (“*inanis et vacua*”) also shows little relationship to the LXX.

Within the early versions the influence of the LXX is at least as old as the Geneva Bible (“without forme and void,” 1599), reflecting Calvin’s own influence from the Vulgate, “*informis et inanis*” (67). However, his understanding of *informis et inanis* is not the same as the image suggested to the modern reader in the English equivalent, “formless and void,” as his

commentary on these words shows: “Were we now to take away, I say, from the earth all that God added after the time here alluded to, then we should have this rude and unpolished, or rather shapeless chaos” (Calvin, 73). In the days of the early versions, “formless” and “void” would not have suggested the same cosmological images as those terms in a scientific age such as ours.

5 יוֹם אֶחָד (*yôm ʾeḥād*, lit., “one day”) should not be read as though it were “first day” (Ex 12:15 – 16; Lev 23 *passim*), as the uses of *yôm ʾeḥād* elsewhere in Genesis demonstrate (27:45; 33:13; cf. 1Sa 27:1; Isa 9:13; Jnh 3:4). Cassuto’s explanation is forced but worthy of note: “There was only *one day* for the second had not yet been created” (30). Why would the writer have avoided the use of *yôm riʾšôn* (“first day”) in this chapter? There are two possible solutions.

First, the grammatical construction of Genesis 1 allows potentially for two “first days” at the beginning of the chapter. The day that begins in v.3 — וַיְהִי אוֹר (*wayᵉhî-ʾôr*, “and there was light”) — and the day that may appear to begin in v.1 — בְּרֵאשִׁית (*bᵉrēʾšît*) In his conception of the narrative of ch. 1, the author may have wanted to avoid the idea that the day that begins in v.3 was actually יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן (*yôm riʾšôn*, “the first day”). He may have wanted to reserve the notion of “the first day” for the day that begins with *bᵉrēʾšît* in v.1. Thus *yôm ʾeḥād* could have been used to avoid the misconception. In the same way the author does not say “the first river” (הַנָּהָר הָרִאשׁוֹן, *hannāhār hāriʾšôn*]) in 2:11 (the NIV does not bring out this distinction), but rather, “one (river)” (הָאֶחָד, *haʾeḥād*), because the “first” river (*nāhār* 2:10) that divides into four heads has already been mentioned.

A second possible motive for avoiding the mention of a “first day” is that throughout the Torah the expression יוֹם רִאשׁוֹן (*yôm riʾšôn*) is used to denote the “first day” of a special feast, a day in which there is to be no work, מְלָאכָה (*mᵉlāʾkâ*, “work”; cf. Ex 12:16; Lev 23:7, 35, 39; Nu 28:18). The use of *yôm ʾeḥād* may have been intended to avoid a possible objection to the work (*mᵉlāʾkâ*) of God on one such *yôm riʾšôn* in ch. 1. The well-known textual problem in 2:2 (q.v.) is centered on a similar objection.

b. Second day (1:6 – 8)

> 6And God said, “Let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water.” 7So God made the expanse and separated the water

under the expanse from the water above it. And it was so. 8God called the expanse “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning — the second day.

COMMENTARY

6 – 8 The sense of the account of the second day of creation is largely determined by one’s understanding of the author’s perspective or viewpoint. How does the author understand and use the term “expanse” (*rāqîaʿ*, GK 8385)? Does it reflect a cosmological perspective; that is, is it intended to describe a part of the created universe? For example, Delitzsch (96) saw the “expanse” in terms of the outer regions of the universe, “the higher ethereal region, the so-called atmosphere, the sky, is here meant; it is represented as the semi- spherical vault of heaven stretched over the earth and its water.” Or does the term describe something in the immediate everyday experience of the author, e.g., the “clouds” that hold the rain? Wenham, 19, appears to take such a view: “Put another way, the firmament occupies the space between the earth’s surface and the clouds.”

We must be careful neither to let our own view of the universe or what we suppose to have been the view of the ancients (Gunkel, 107) to control our understanding of the biblical author’s description of the “expanse” (*rāqîaʿ*.). Even if we were relatively certain of these viewpoints, we must seek clues from the biblical text itself. One such clue is the purpose the author assigns to the word “expanse” in v.6: it is “to separate water from water.” The “expanse” is intended to hold water above the land; that much is certain. A second clue is the name given to the *rāqîaʿ*. . In v.8 it is called “sky”(*šāmāyim*). Finally, we should look at the uses of “expanse” within ch. 1, where the term refers not only to the place where God put the sun, moon, and stars (v.14) but also to that place where the birds fly (v.20: “across the expanse of the sky”).

Is there a word (in English) or idea that accommodates such a broad use of the term “expanse”? Cosmological terms such as “ceiling,” “vault,” or “global ocean,” which are often used for “expanse” in ch. 1, suit neither the use of the term in v.20 nor the naming of the “expanse” as “sky.” Such explanations, though drawn from analogies of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, are too specific for the present context. Thus it is unlikely that the narrative has in view here a “solid partition or vault that separates the earth from the waters above”

(Wester-mann, 116). More likely the narrative has in view something within humankind's everyday experience of the natural world — in general terms, that place where the birds fly and where God placed the lights of heaven (cf. v.14). In English the word "sky" appears to cover this sense well.

The "waters above" the sky is then likely a reference to clouds. This appears to be the view that comes from the reflections on this passage seen in later biblical texts. For example, in the author's account of the flood in ch. 7, reference is made to the "floodgates of the heavens [*haššāmayim*]," which, when opened, pour forth rain (vv.11 – 12; cf. 2Ki 7:2; Pss 104:3; 147:8; 148:4). Deuteronomy 33:26 identifies "the heavens" with "the clouds" (see Ps 36:6; Isa 45:8; Jer 51:9). The writer of Proverbs 8:28 has also understood the term "expanse" and the "waters above it" in Genesis 1 to refer to "clouds" (*śəḥāqîm*), as does Psalm 78:23.

Some have pointed to a subtle but possibly significant tension between the statements of vv.6 and 7. Whereas v.6 recounts the creation of the "expanse" by God's "word" alone ("And God said"), it has been suggested that v.7 presents God's creation of the "expanse" as a divine "act" ("So God made"). Throughout ch. 1 there is a consistent alternation between accounts of God's speaking and acting, often giving the impression of duplication and redundancy (cf. v.11 with v.12; v.14 with v.16; v.24 with v.25). This impression is heightened by the recurring expression, "and it was so" (*wayəhîkēn*) which suggests that what God commanded was accomplished without his having to "make" it.

A close reading of ch. 1 could make it appear that the author at first recounts God's creative work as the result of his spoken word ("And God said . . . and it was so") and then as a divine work that must be carried out to completion ("And God made . . . "). If such observations are correct, we are left with the impression that the creation account of ch. 1 has little internal consistency and coherence. Though such an outcome cannot be ruled out, it is worth asking whether there is another explanation for the apparent duplicity that runs throughout Genesis 1.

A ready explanation lies in a consideration of the nature of narrative texts such as the present account of creation. A twofold task lies before the authors of narrative texts. It is not only their responsibility to recount and report events

from the past, that is, to maintain a consistent and continuous flow of narrated events within the world of the narrative. They should also supply the reader with a measure of commentary on the events recorded, that is, to "monitor" the reader's understanding and then to facilitate an appreciation of the meaning of those events.

Such is the case for the author of Genesis, for example, in 2:24. There the flow of narrative is momentarily set aside for the purpose of addressing the reader directly with a word of advice and application: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." At that point in the narrative, the author is directly managing the reader's response to the events of the narrative. Wolfgang Schneider has suggested that these comments by the narrator are signaled by the author's use of the verb *yiqtol* (*Grammatik des biblischen Hebräisch* [Mulnchen: Claudius, 2001], 188 – 89). Although in the past little attention has been paid to such features of narrative, it has become increasingly apparent that the biblical narratives, like most others, must have such features to some degree (see Robert de Beaugrade and Wolfgang Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* [London: Longman, 1981], 163ff.). The reader's understanding of the text cannot be completely left up to the reader.

It may be possible to explain difficulties and irregularities in Genesis by looking for such "reader conscious" strategies in the narrative. For example, in 1:24 the author recounted the fact that God spoke and the animals came into being: "And God said. . . . And it was so [*wayᵉhî-kēn*]." But then he follows that description of God's work by a "reader-oriented" comment: God made the animals according to their own kind, and he saw that it was good (v.25). Presumably the purpose of such a comment is to assure the reader that it is, in fact, God who made the animals and not *anyone* else and, also, to underscore the fact that God made the animals "according to their kinds" (v.24) — a key theme in this chapter that has its ultimate focal point in the one major exception, the creation of human beings "in the image of God" (v.27).

In other words, behind the creation account of Genesis 1 appears to lie the concern found in Psalm 104, especially vv.27 – 30:

> These all look to you . . .
> when you take away their breath,

they die and return to the dust.
When you send your Spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

God is the Creator of all life, both animal and human. Such a reading of ch. 1 not only accounts for the duplications throughout this chapter, but more importantly it allows for a more explicit reckoning of the overall intention of the author, who by monitoring and interpreting the text for the reader reveals his chief interest in the events recounted. Thus at each point along the way the writer can be seen as preparing the reader for a proper understanding of the narrative.

NOTE

7 The MT reads וַיְהִי־כֵן (*wayᶜhî-kēn*, , "and it was so") at the end of v.7, but in the LXX its equivalent, καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως (*kai egeneto houtōs*), occurs at the end of v.6. Throughout the rest of the chapter *wayᶜhî-kēn* occurs between God's spoken word — וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (*wayyōʾmer ʾĕlōhîm*, "and God said") — and the narration of God's action — וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים (*wayyaᶜaś ʾĕlōhîm*, "and God made"; cf. vv.9b, 11b, 15b, 24b, 30b). In the two places where the MT does not follow that scheme (vv.6 and 20) the LXX reads καὶ ἐγένετοοὕτως (*kai egeneto houtōs*, "and it was so"), suggesting that the LXX readings are an attempt to correct the imbalance of the MT. In keeping with that tendency, the LXX also reads καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι καλόν (*kai eiden ho theos hoti kalon*) in v.8, filling in the lack of the expression, "and God saw that it was good," for the second day. The overall impression given by the LXX in these instances is of a secondary attempt to provide a balanced, consistent text. Thus the MT is the more original.

c. Third day (1:9 – 13)

9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. 10 God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

11 Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. 12 The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And

God saw that it was good. 13And there was evening, and there was morning — the third day.

COMMENTARY

9 – 13 There are two works of God on the third day: (1) the preparation of the dry land and seas and (2) the furnishing of the dry land with shrubs and fruit trees. Unlike the work of the second day, which was not specifically declared "good," both acts on the third day are called "good" *ṭôḇ*, because both benefit humankind. Both acts relate to the preparation of the land, a central concern of the author of Genesis (cf. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:4).

The separation of the waters and the preparation of the dry land are to be read in light of the subsequent accounts of the flood (chs. 6 – 9) and the parting of the "Red Sea" (Ex 14 – 15). In all three accounts the waters stand in the way of humankind's habitation of the land. The waters must be removed or put aside in order for humankind to enjoy God's gift of the land. Just as we learn from the accounts of the flood and the crossing of the Red Sea, the waters are used as God's instrument of judgment on those who disobey him.

The author of Genesis is not merely recounting past events; he is building a case for the importance of obedience to God's will. In the creation account of ch. 1 he begins with the simple picture of God's power at work harnessing the great sea (*tᵉhôm* , v.2; NIV, "the deep"). It is a picture of God's working for the "good" of humankind. In the account of the flood, when the narrative returns to the picture of God's power over the waters of the great sea (*tᵉhôm* , 7:11; NIV, "deep"), it is a bitter reminder of the other side of God's power. The sea (*tᵉhôm*) has become an instrument of divine judgment.

In a second act on the third day, God furnishes the land (*hā'āreṣ*) with shrubs and abundant fruit trees. In the present shape of the narrative it is likely that the author intended a connection to be drawn between God's furnishing of the land with fruit trees in ch. 1 and his furnishing of the "garden" with trees "good for food" in ch. 2. Regardless of one's opinion about whether the two creation accounts in chs. 1 and 2 originally belonged together, there is little doubt that as they currently stand in the narrative, they are meant to be read as a single account.

The implications of reading the two chapters together are greater than is often acknowledged. One implication is that if the two accounts are about the same work of God, the "land" (*hā'āreṣ*) in ch. 1 is identified as the "garden" of ch. 2, or at least the place called Eden. The focus of the creation account in ch. 1 would then be that land that is identified as, or located in, the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. We will have more to say about the location of Eden in the comments on ch. 2, but for now it suffices to point to the connection between "the land" and its "fruit trees" in ch. 1 and the fruit trees of the garden in ch. 2.

The selectivity of the creation account can be seen in its focus on "seed-bearing plants" and "fruit trees" in vv. 11 – 12. Those are the plants that are to be for humankind's food. No other forms of vegetation are mentioned for the third day, though there are other kinds of food mentioned at the end of the account (1:30). The author apparently assumes that the plants used by the animals for food were created "in the beginning" of 1:1 (see Notes).

NOTES

9 The LXX reading συναγωγήν (*synagōgēn*,"be gathered") has suggested a Hebrew text that read מִקְוֵה (*miqweh*, "gathering") rather than the MT's מָקוֹם (*māqôm* "place"). Westermann (79), following Cassuto (35), has favored the MT over the LXX on the grounds that אֶחָד (*'eḥād*, "one") would not likely be used with *miqweh*: "The number *one* can readily be understood in connection with *place* . . . but it is not appropriate to *pool* for there were no other pools in existence" (Cassuto, 35). The argument is inappropriate in a textual decision. What has to be determined is which reading is more original, not whether a reading can more readily be understood than the other.

The LXX was perhaps guided in its rendering by a desire to assimilate the far object (συναγωγήν) to the verb (συναχθήτω, *synachthētō*) The last half of v.9 in the LXX — "and the water that was under the heaven gathered together into their pools and the dry land appeared"— does not commend itself as more original than the shorter MT because of the tendency already observed in the LXX to fill out and balance the lack of symmetry in the MT.

11 The MT accentuation makes it clear that the Masoretes read דֶּשֶׁא (*deše'*, as the main idea that is explicated by the two kinds of plants, עֵשֶׂב (*ʿēśeb*,"plants") and עֵץ (*ʿēṣ*, "trees"). Westermann (79) correctly says that if such is the sense of the verse, the lack of a *waw* between *ʿēśeb* and *ʿēṣ* is difficult. But to suggest on those grounds that the *waw* form (*wʿēṣ*) of the versions is the better text overlooks the fact that in most cases the difficult reading is to be taken as the more original. Certainly the *wʿēṣ* of v.12 shows that the narrative envisions two kinds of plants, *ʿēśeb* and *ʿēṣ*

But the *wʿēṣ* of v.12 can also explain why the versions would have added the *wʿēṣ* in v.11. It is best to leave the MT intact and read v.11 as a single sentence. The first clause — תַּדְשֵׁא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא (*tadšē' hā'āreṣ deše'*, "Let the land produce vegetation") — is in apposition (Andersen, 46) to the sentence that follows — מַזְרִיעַ זֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה (*ʿēśeb mazrîaʿ zeraʿ ʿēṣ pʿrî*, "seed-bearing plants and fruit trees"), which consists of two clauses in "asyndetic coordination" (ibid., 57). The *wʿēṣ*. in v.12, then, can be viewed as a repetition and explication of God's words in v.11. The *waw* in *wʿēṣ*. makes explicit the "asyndetic coordination" of the *ʿēṣ* in v.11.

Another way to read the *ʿēṣ* of the MT in v.11 is as an appositional sentence, the second clause of the sentence, *ʿēṣ pʿrî*, explaining the first clause, *ʿēśeb mazrîaʿ zeraʿ* (Andersen, 46). Thus there is only one kind of vegetation (*deše'*) in v.11, the "seed-bearing plants, namely [apposition] the fruit trees." Such a reading explains why לְמִינוֹ (*lʾmînô*, "according to its [singular] various kinds") occurs only once in v.11 and twice in v.12. It also illustrates the close relationship between chs. 1 and 2 of Genesis. Already the notion of "fruit trees," so prominent in ch. 2, is made the central focus in ch. 1.

While it is true that the term *ʿēṣ pʿrî* is rare (Ge 1:11; Ps 148:9; Ecc 2:5), it is explicitly explained and qualified in v.12 ("trees bearing fruit"). In Psalm 148:9 *ʿēṣ pʿrî* occurs with *kol-ʾărāzîm* in a series of contrasts —"mountains and all hills, fruit trees [*ʿēṣ pʿrî*] and all cedars [*ʾărāzîm*], wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds" — suggesting that the expression does not refer to trees in general but to a specific type of tree. At the end of Genesis 1 (v.29), the narrative looks back to the two kinds of plants brought forth on the third day — *ʿēśeb* ("plant") and *hāʾēṣ ʾăšer-bô pʿrî-ʿēṣ* ("plant") and (*wayʿhî-kēn*) ("every tree that has fruit in it") — stating that they are the food for humankind. The animals, however, are given a different diet in v.30: bc[, qry, < e יֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב (*yereq ʿēśeb*,"every green plant"). There is no mention of their being "made" or "created" on the third day. This

suggests that the description of the land sprouting plants on the third day had only humankind's nourishment in view.

d. Fourth Day (1:14 – 19)

> [14]And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, [15]and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. [16]God made two great lights — the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. [17]God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, [18]to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. [19]And there was evening, and there was morning — the fourth day.

COMMENTARY

14 The narration of events on the fourth day raises several questions. Does the text state that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day? If so, how could "the heavens and the earth," which surely included the sun, moon, and stars, have been created "in the beginning" (v.1)? Could there have been a "day and night" during the first three days of creation without the sun, which was not created until the fourth day? Were there plants and vegetation on the land (created on the third day) before the creation of the sun on the fourth day?

Keil, 59, represents a common evangelical view when he suggests that though "the heavens and the earth" were created "in the beginning" (v.1), it was not until the fourth day that they were "completed." Keil's explanation can be seen already in the work of Calvin, who states that "the world was not perfected at its very commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, but . . . was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth." According to Calvin, this "empty chaos" was filled on the fourth day with the sun, moon, and stars. Calvin's view is similar to that of Rashi (a medieval commentator): "[The sun, moon, and stars] were created on the first day, but on the fourth day [God] commanded that they be placed in the sky."

Another common view — the “Restitution Theory” or “Gap Thory,” now somewhat out of fashion — is reflected in the *Scofield Bible*, though it can be found much earlier in the history of interpretation (cf. O. Zockler, “Schopfung,” in *Real Encyklopadie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* 20 [Gotha: Rudolf Besser, 1866], 735 – 36): “The sun and moon were created ‘in the beginning.’ The ‘light’ of course came from the sun, but the vapour diffused the light. Later the sun appeared in an unclouded sky.” According to this view the sun, moon, and stars were created “in the beginning” in 1:1, but they could not be seen from the earth until the fourth day.

Both of the above approaches to the questions raised by this passage seek to avoid what appears to be the obvious sense of the text, that is, that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day. Both views attempt to adjust the sense of the verb “made” so that it harmonizes with the statement of the first verse: God “created” the world in the beginning.

But there is another way to look at this text — a way that provides a coherent reading of both 1:1 and 1:14 – 18. First we must decide on the meaning of the phrase, “the heavens and the earth,” in v.1 (see Notes). If the phrase means “universe” or “cosmos,” as is most probable (H. H. Schmid, *THAT*, 1:229), then it must be taken with the same sense it has throughout its uses in the Bible (e.g., Joel 4[3]:15 – 16); thus, it includes the sun, moon, and stars. So the starting point of an understanding of vv.14 – 18 is the notion that the whole of the universe, including the sun, moon, and stars, was created “in the beginning” (v.1) and not on the fourth day.

The second step is a consideration of the syntax of v.14 (see Notes). When the syntax of v.14 is compared with that of the creation of the “expanse” in v.6, the two verses have a significantly different meaning. The syntax of v.6 suggests that when God said,“Let there be an expanse,” he was, in fact, making an expanse where there was none previously. In v.14, however, the syntax is not the same, though the translations are similar in English. In v.14 God does not say, “Let there be lights . . . to separate,” as though there were no lights before this command and afterward the lights were created. Rather, the Hebrew text reads,“And God said,‘Let the lights in the expanse of the sky be for separating. . . .’ ”

In other words, in v.14 God's command assumes that the lights are *already* in the expanse, and in response to his command the lights are given a purpose, namely, "to separate the day from the night" and "to mark seasons and days and years." If the difference between the syntax of v.6 (the use of *hyh* alone) and v.14 (*hyh* + *l* infinitive; cf. GKC, 114h) is significant, which we must assume it is, it suggests that the author did not intend the account of the fourth day as an account of the creation of the lights; on the contrary, the narrative assumes that the heavenly lights have already been created, presumably "in the beginning."

15 – 19 A third observation comes from the structure of vv.15 – 16. The author adds the expression, "and it was so" (*wayᶜhî-kēn*), to the end of v.15. As explained earlier, this expression marks the end of the author's "report" and the beginning of his "comment" (commentary) in v.16 (see comment on vv.6 – 7). Thus v.16 is not an account of the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day. It is, rather, a comment directed to the reader drawing out the significance of what has just been recounted: "So God [not anyone else] made the lights and put them into the sky" (my trans.).

Behind this narrative is the author's concern to emphasize that God alone created the lights of the heavens, and thus no one else is to be given the glory and honor due only to God (cf. Ne 9:6). The passage also states that God created the lights in the heavens for a purpose, namely, to divide day and night and to mark the "seasons and days and years" (vv.17 – 18). These two concerns form the heart of ch. 1. God alone is the Creator of all things and worthy of the worship of people.

NOTE

14 יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמָּיִם (*yᵉhî raqîaᶜ bᵉtôk hammāyim*, "Let there be an expanse between the waters") in v.6 is to be distinguished from the similar clause in v.14 — יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בִּרְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם לְהַבְדִּיל- (*yᵉhî mᵉʾōrōtbirqîaᶜ haššāmayim lᵉhabdîl*, "Let the lights in the expanse of the sky separate"). The verb הָיָה (*hāyâ*) in v.6 is a simple predicate: "Let there be," whereas in v.14 *hāyâ* has a complementary infinitive, *lᵉhabdîl*, which expresses a purpose: "Let the lights be for separating." Acccording to GKC (par. 114h): "Just as clearly the idea of aiming at a definite purpose or turning towards

an object may be seen in the combination of the verb הָיָה [*hāyâ*] *to be* with ל [*l*] and an infinitive."

e. Fifth Day (1:20 – 23)

20 And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 21So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 22God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." 23And there was evening, and there was morning — the fifth day.

COMMENTARY

20 – 23 The filling of the land and waters by the living creatures is divided into the work of two days. On the fifth day, as the account reads, God commanded the water creatures to fill the waters and the flying creatures to fly through the skies. Verse 20 does not say, or suggest, that the waters and the sky were to *produce* these creatures, as the translators of the KJV rendered it: "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures . . . and fowl *that* may fly above the earth." Rather, the Hebrew text says that the waters were commanded to "swarm with" them. Furthermore, the waters were not commanded to produce the birds or flying creatures; the birds were only commanded to "fly over the land."

It is only when we come to v.21 that the text speaks of God's creation of these animals along with the "great sea creatures." It is not immediately clear how v.21 relates to the creatures in v.20 and to God's creation (בָּרָא [*bārā'*]) of the universe in 1:1. Clearly v.21 is a statement about the creation (בָּרָא [*bārā'*]) of "the creeping things with which the waters teemed" and "all the birds." These are the two groups mentioned in v.20.

The relationship of vv.20 and 21 can be understood in at least two ways. The two verses may be saying that the creatures that were to fill the waters and the sky in v.20 were created by God to do so in v.21. In addition, God at that time also created the "great sea creatures." The problem with this view is that the order of the two verses is reversed. It is unlikely that God would command these

creatures to do something (v.20) before they were created (v.21). But that is what God's statement in v.20 would imply if v.21 speaks of the immediate creation of the creatures commanded to fill the waters and the skies in v.20.Verse 20 clearly implies these creatures already exist.

Verse 21 may also be understood as a back reference to God's creating (*bārā'*) the universe ("heavens and earth") in v.1. As such it may be intended as a reminder that these creatures had already been "created" (*bārā'*) along with the rest of the universe in v.1. The NIV renders this well: "And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.' " The sense of the words "teem with" in v.20 is clear in Exodus 7:3: "The Nile will teem with frogs." As with the rest of the plagues against Egypt, the Nile does not "make" or "create" the frogs; rather, it is filled with them to running over. The same sense is found in Genesis 8:17 when after the flood the land is replenished with animals of every kind.

This suggests that after the first verse in Genesis 1, the rest of the chapter focuses on God's work of "making" the land (world) a suitable place for humankind (see discussion below). The animals that were created "in the beginning" are brought in to populate "the world" God is preparing during the days of this week. This further suggests the "world" of the narrative is limited to the horizons of "the ancient world." The account was not intended to be read with the same global scope as is often imposed on Genesis today.

On the sixth day (vv.24 – 28) God "made" the land creatures (v.25) and "created" humankind (v.27). The word *bārā'* ("to create"; GK 1343) is used six times in the creation account (1:1, 21, 27; 2:3). Elsewhere the word *ʿāśâ* ("to make"; GK 6913) is used. There is every reason to respect the author's specific uses of these two words. This becomes particularly clear in 2:3, where on the seventh day "God rested from all his work which he *created* [*barìa*ì,] *to make* [*ʿāśâ*]h (lit. trans.). God's work was first "to create" the world and then "to make" it. He first "*created*" everything ("heavens and earth") in 1:1 and then he "*made*" it suitable for humankind's dwelling during the six-day week that followed. God pronounced "good" each work that "he made," meaning that these works were now fit for use by humankind.

Recognizing these specific uses of "create" and "make" helps one understand

the use of the term (bārā') with reference to the "great creatures of the sea" (v.21). Some have suggested that (bārā') at this point in the narrative is intended to mark the beginning of a new stage in the creation account. It marks the creation of the "living beings." This is a group distinct from the vegetation and physical world of the previous days and hence is marked by the term (bārā') (von Rad, Westermann). Each new step in the account is marked by the use of (bārā'): the universe (v.1), the living creatures (v.21), and humankind (v.26).

A second explanation of these two terms is that the use of (bārā') in v.21 is intended to recall God's work of creation in 1:1. It was during the "beginning" that God created ((bārā')) all of these creatures; on the fifth day he commanded them to fill the waters and the land made ready for them in the first four days. Why single out the "great sea creatures" (v.21) among all the animals created in the beginning in 1:1? Perhaps it was to give a balanced perspective of creation, over against the mention of the small and, perhaps, insignificant creatures that "swarm" in the waters and the birds that fly over it. God made all creatures, great and small. The perspective of Genesis 1 is reflected in Psalm 104:25 – 26, "There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — living things both large and small. There the ships go to and from, and the leviathan ['the great sea creature'], which you formed to frolic there."

NOTE

The orderliness of this account is evident, as is its lack of specificity in several cases. The primary interest of the author is to show all living creatures as parts of three distinct groups: the sea creatures and sky creatures, of the fifth day, and the land creatures (including humankind), of the sixth day.

For the first time in the creation account, the notion of "blessing" appears (v.22). The blessing of the sea and sky creatures is identical with the blessing of humankind, with the exception of "dominion." Dominion over creation is given only to humanity. When "living beings" are created, the "blessing" is appropriate because the blessing relates to the giving of life. The theme of blessing and life will continue to occupy center stage throughout the Genesis narratives. Ultimately what is lost in the fall in Genesis 3 is access to the tree of life — "lest they take of the tree of life and eat and live forever" (Ge 3:22). What is at stake

in the program initiated in Genesis 1 is the regaining of eternal life after its loss. That is the ultimate aim of the blessing promised to and through the "seed" of Abraham (cf. Ps 133:3).

21 The choice of the verb בָּרָא (*bārāʾ*, "to create") in this verse is related to the theme of the "blessing." Note the alliteration (*bār/bār*) between "to create" (*bārāʾ*) and "to bless" (*bārak*) throughout the account:

(1) 1:21–22: וַיִּבְרָא ... וַיְבָרֶךְ (*wayyibrāʾ ... wayᶜbārek*)
(2) 1:27–28: וַיִּבְרָא ... וַיְבָרֶךְ (*wayyibrāʾ ... wayᶜbārek*)
(3) 2:3a,b: בָּרָא ... וַיְבָרֶךְ (*wayᶜbārek ... bārāʾ*)
(4) 5:2a,b: בְּרָאָם ... וַיְבָרֶךְ (*wayᶜbārek ... bᵉrāʾām*)

In the same way the choice of (*bārāʾ*) at the beginning of the chapter (1:1) appears to be related to an alliteration (*bār/bēr*) with *bᵉrēʾšît*.

f. Sixth Day (1:24 – 31)

24 And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their
kinds: livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals,
each according to its kind." And it was so. 25God made the wild animals
according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the
creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God
saw that it was good.
26Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let
them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock,
over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created
him; male and female he created them.
28God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number;
fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the
air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."
29Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the
whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours
for food. 30And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and
all the creatures that move on the ground — everything that has the breath
of life in it — I give every green plant for food." And it was so.
31God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was

evening, and there was morning — the sixth day.

COMMENTARY

24 – 25 The account of the creation of the land creatures on the sixth day distinguishes two types of creatures: the "living creatures" that dwell on the land and human beings. In turn the "living creatures" of the land are divided into three groups: "livestock,""creatures that move along the ground," and "wild animals" (v.24). Humankind is distinguished as "male" and "female" (v.27).

Once again the author begins with a divine word —"And God said" (*wayyō'mer 'lōhîm*) — in v.24 and follows with the narrator's comment to the reader in v.25: "God made" (*wayyaʿaś 'lōhîm*). At first the comment in v.25 may not appear to add significantly to what is reported of the divine word in v.24. However, a comparison of these verses with similar verses (e.g., vv.11 – 12) shows that v.25 adds an important clarification to the word spoken in v.24. In v.11 God said, "Let the land produce vegetation" (*taḏšē' hā'āreṣ deše'*) then the narrator adds the comment, "The land produced vegetation" (*tôṣē' hā'āreṣ deše'*, v.12).

The point of the comment was to point out that the land, not God, produced the vegetation. In vv.24 – 25, however, there is a shift in emphasis. Verse 24 reports a word similar to that in v.11: "Let the land produce living creatures" (*tôṣē' hā'āreṣ*; but the comment that follows in v.25 stresses that it was God who made the living creatures: "God made the wild animals" *nepeš ḥayyâ*); The author wants to show that though the divine word was the same for the creation of both the vegetation and the living creatures on land, there was a distinction between the origins of the two forms of life.Vegetation was produced from the land, but the living creatures were made directly by God. The life of "living creatures" originates from God and is to be distinguished from the rest of the physical world (cf. the creation of human beings and the animals in ch. 2).

26 – 27 The creation of humankind is set apart from the previous acts of creation by a series of subtle contrasts with the earlier accounts of God's acts. First, in v.26, the beginning of the creation of humans is marked by the usual, "And God said." However, God's word that follows is not an impersonal (third person) "Let there be"; rather, what is used is the personal (first person) "Let us

make."

Second, throughout the previous narrative each creature is made "according to its own kind" (*ʾmînāh*).But the account of the creation of humankind specifically notes that the man and the woman were not made "according to their own kind." Rather, they were made "in [God's] image" (*bᵉṣalmēnû*). They are not merely like themselves, they are also like God; they share a likeness to their Creator.

Third, the creation of humankind is specifically noted as a creation as "male and female" (v.27). The author has not considered gender an important feature in his account of the creation of the other forms of life, but for humanity it is clearly of considerable importance. Thus the narrative puts heavy stress on the fact that God created man as "male and female."

Fourth, only humanity has been given dominion in God's creation. Humankind's dominion is expressly stated to be over all other living creatures: those of the sky, sea, and land.

Why the author has singled out the creation of humankind in this way? One answer is that the author intends to portray him as a special creature marked off from the rest of God's works. But the author's purpose seems to go beyond merely marking humankind as different from the rest of the creatures; the narrative is also intent on showing that humans are like God. As much as they are not like the other creatures, they are to that extent also like God.

Behind the account of the creation of humans in this narrative lies the purpose of the author of Genesis and the Pentateuch. In this broader picture of humankind's creation, the reader is given a perspective on certain facts that are to serve as the starting point for the larger purposes of the Pentateuch. Humans are creatures. But more than that, they are special creatures. They are made in the image and likeness of God.

There have been many attempts to explain the plural forms: "Let [*naʿᵃśeh*] man in *our* image [*bᵉṣalmēnû*], in *our* likeness [*kidmûtēnû*].h Wes-termann, 1:144 – 45, summarizes the explanations given for the use of plurals under four headings: (1) the plural is a reference to the Trinity; (2) the plural is a reference to God and the heavenly court of angels; (3) the plural is an attempt to avoid the idea of an

immediate resemblance of humans to God; (4) the plural is an expression of deliberation on God's part while setting out to create humankind.

The singulars in v.27 (*bᵉṣalmô*,"in his own image," and *bᵉṣelem ʾĕlōhîm*, "in the image of God"; cf. 5:1) rule out the second explanation (i.e., that the plural refers to a heavenly court of angels), since in the immediate context humans are said to be created "in *his* image," with no mention made of humans' being made in the image of the angels. To this the author adds a further qualification that God made humankind "in the image of God." This seems to be an intentional refutation of the notion that the plurals in v.26 refer to the angels.

The third and fourth explanations are both *possible* within the context, but neither explanation is specifically *supported* by the context. It is not convincing to point to 11:7 in support of the notion of deliberation, since the use of the plural in that passage is motivated by the chiastic wordplay between the words *nabelâh* ("let us confuse," 11:7) and *nilbenâ* ("let us make," 11:3; see J. P. Fokklemann, *Narrative Art in Genesis* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975]). Where we do find unequivocal deliberation (as in 18:17), it is not the plural that is used but the singular: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" As Westermann has stated, the first explanation is "a dogmatic judgment," though we could add that it is not a judgment that runs counter to the passage itself. However, if we seek an answer from the immediate context, we should turn to the following verse(s) for additional clues.

In v.27 it is stated twice that humankind was created (*bārāʾ*) in God's image, and a third time that humans were created (*bārāʾ*) "male and female."The same pattern is found in Genesis 5:1 – 2a: "When God created [*bārāʾ*] man . . . he created [*bārāʾ*] them male and female."The singular "man" *ʾādām* is created as a plurality, "male and female" *zākār ûnᵉqēbâ*.In a similar way the one God (*wayyōʾmer ʾĕlōhîm*m, "And God said") created humanity through an expression of plurality (*naʿᵃśeh ʾādām bᵉṣalmēnû*, "Let us make man in our image"). Following this clue, the divine plurality of persons expressed in v.26 can be seen as an anticipation of the human plurality of persons reflected in man and woman, thus casting human personal relationships in the role of reflecting God's own personhood.

> Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in

the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female, and then to go on to ask against this background in what the original and prototype of the divine existence of the Creator consists? (K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3/1 [New York: Scribner, 1956], 195).

28 The importance of the blessing in v.28 should not be overlooked. Throughout the remainder of Genesis and the Pentateuch, the divine "blessing" remains a central theme. The living creatures were blessed on the fifth day (v.22); thus the author's view of the blessing extends beyond humankind to all God's living creatures. In v.28 humanity is included in God's blessing. The blessing in these verses consists of "posterity": "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth."Thus already here the fulfillment of the blessing is tied to humankind's "seed" and the notion of "life" — two themes that will later dominate the narratives of Genesis.

The imperatives "Be fruitful," "increase," and "fill" should not be understood as commands here, since the introductory statement identifies them as a "blessing" (*wayᵉbārek*).The imperative, along with the jussive, is the common mood of the blessing (cf. 27:19).

g. Seventh Day (2:1 – 3)

> [1] Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.
> [2] By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 The author has set the seventh day apart from the first six, not only by stating specifically that God "sanctified" it, but also by changing the style of the account markedly. On the seventh day God does not "speak" (*wayᵉbārek*), nor does he "work" (*wayyōʾmer*).That day he "blessed" (*wayᵉbārek*, v.3) and "sanctified" (*wayᵉqaddēš*;NIV, "made it holy"). The reader is left with a somber and repetitive reminder of only one fact: God did not work on the seventh day — he rested. This one fact is repeated three times: God did not work. The author surely intends by this to identify the seventh day with the notion of divine "rest."

The author likely also intends the reader to understand the account of the seventh day in the light of the "image of God" theme of the sixth day. If the purpose of pointing to the "likeness" between human beings and their Creator was to call on the reader to be like God (e.g., Lev 11:45), then it is significant that the account of the seventh day stresses the very thing the writer elsewhere so ardently calls on the reader to do: "rest" on the seventh day (cf. Ex 20:8 – 11).

If, as we suggested earlier (see above on 1:1), the author's intention is to point to the past as a picture of the future, then the emphasis on God's "rest" forms an important part of the author's understanding of what lies in the future. At important points along the way the author will return to the theme of God's "rest" as a reminder of what yet lies ahead (2:15; 5:29; 8:4; Ex 20:11; Dt 5:14; 12:10; 25:19). Later biblical writers continued to see a parallel between God's "rest" in creation and the future "rest" that awaits the faithful (Ps 95:11; Heb 3:11).

NOTES

1 The threefold expression הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם (*haššāmayim wᵉhāʾāreṣ wᵉkol-ṣᵉbāʾām*, "the heavens and the earth . . . in all their vast array") refers to the "sky" (*haššāmayim*) of 1:8 and the "land" (*hāʾāreṣ*) of 1:10, which were made and then filled with "their array" (*ṣᵉbāʾām*, lit., "their hosts") in the remainder of the chapter (cf. Dt 4:19, where *ṣebāʾ haššāmayim* refers to the "the stars"); this expression is not a repetition of the hendiadys of 1:1 (.r,a;h; taew" ìyIm/V;h/ tae (אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ [*ʾēt haššāmayim wᵉʾēt hāʾāreṣ*], which refers to the entire "universe." The NIV overlooks this distinction and takes the verse as a back reference to 1:1. In so doing it resorts to an unlikely paraphrase of *wᵉkol-ṣᵉbāʾām* as "in all their vast array."

2 As is evident in the versions (Samar., LXX, Syr.), the thought of God's possibly "finishing his work" on the Sabbath, or seventh day, gave rise to a secondary reading of הַשִּׁשִּׁי (*haššiššî*, "the sixth"): viz., "God finished his work on the sixth day." As the parallel in Exodus 40:33b shows, *wayᵉkal … mᵉlāʾkâ* here states that God's work was finished on the seventh day. He had no further work to do.

The second half of the verse states it positively: “So on the seventh day he rested from all his work.”

3 Unlike the other days of creation, the seventh day does not conclude with, “and there was evening, and there was morning — the seventh day.” In this respect the seventh day stands apart from the other six days in not having an account of its conclusion. It is this feature of the narrative that suggests a picture of an eternal, divine “Sabbath.”

The addition of the infinitive לַעֲשׂוֹת (*la*ʿ*śôt*, “had done”) is important in that it shows the distinct meanings of the two words in ch. 1: ar;B; 1: בָּרָא (*bārāʾ*) and עָשָׂה (ʿ*āśâ*) God “created” the world and then “made it,” or “God created” the world “to make it.” Consequently, immediately after the narrative of the fall (3:21) God is again the subject of the verb ʿ*āśâ*, which points to an interruption of God’s “Sabbath”: “The LORD God made ʿ*āśâ*, garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.”

3. The Gift of the Land (2:4 – 24)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 2 should be read as an integral part of the first chapter. (The chapter divisions are, of course, not original and are sometimes arbitrary. They are referred to here only for the sake of convenience.) The events of each chapter are thus to be read as aspects of a single event. Witte, 61, suggests that ch. 2 has been intentionally embedded in ch. 1 so that it serves as a kind of excursus to ch. 1. Hence at the beginning of ch. 2 the author explicitly returns to the starting point of ch. 1; that is, he returns to the making of the heavens and earth: “When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens” (v.4). This move on his part reestablishes the setting of ch. 1 and links it to ch. 2.

In referring to God’s “making” (ʿ*āśâ*) of the “land and sky,” the author draws attention to two key features in Genesis 1: (1) the contrast in ch. 1 between God’s creating of the universe (“heavens and earth”) in 1:1 and his “making” of the land, sky, and seas in 1:2 – 10, and (2) the focus of ch. 1 on the “land” and

"sky," respectively, not as a merism meaning "universe" as in 1:1, but as two distinct spheres of divine and human activity. The author thus distinguishes 1:1 and 1:2 – 10 as two distinct aspects of creation. God first "creates" (*bārā'*) the universe and then he "makes" the sky (clouds), land, and waters. God creates the world and then makes it a place for humankind's dwelling. Hence on the seventh day God rested from the work "which he created (*ślaḥ haśśādch*) to make [*ʿāśā*]h (2:3).

In ch. 2 the author turns to the question of how humankind is to dwell in God's land. Here are continued the lines of thought on which ch. 1 con-cludes: humankind's being in the "image of God." The account in 1:2 – 2:24 comes to a calculated conclusion with the programmatic announcement that humankind, male and female, are the bearers of the divine "image." Just what that means is left to the explanation given in ch. 2. It is to be expected that the author's central theological interest in ch. 1 — humankind's creation in the "image of God"— finds its continuation in ch. 2. Thus we will not be surprised if we find there a continuation of the theme of the divine "likeness." Just how that theme advances is explained in the following section.

a. Creation of man (2:4 – 7)

> [4]This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.
> When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens — [5]and no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no man to work the ground, [6]but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground — [7]the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

COMMENTARY

4 – 6 The special relationship humankind enjoys by having been created in God's image may already be seen in the title by which God is known in chs. 2 and 3. The title "LORD God" is a combination of two names for God: (1) *God* (Elohim), used in Genesis 1 to speak of the all-powerful Creator, and (2) *LORD*

(YHWH), which is explained in Exodus 3 as “the God who is with you.” The combination of the two names, probably meaning “Yahweh is (the true) God” (Witte, 58), is rare in the Bible. It is used throughout Genesis 2 and 3 but elsewhere in the Pentateuch only in Exodus 9:30.

Curiously, when the serpent speaks of God, it does not refer to him with this double title, “Did God really say . ..” (3:1); nor does the woman use the title in her reply, “God did say . . .” (3:2). It is the narrator of this story and the others who use the double title. In explaining these intentional occurrences of the title, Witte has suggested that they may be a way of specifying humankind’s special relationship to God as both the all-powerful Creator and as the Lord, the One who is with human beings. The serpent does not know God (Elohim) as Lord (Yahweh).

Since the use of “LORD God” in the Pentateuch is almost exclusively limited to Genesis 2 and 3, it may be intended that such a title was known and experienced by humankind only in the garden. It was a divine – human relationship granted on terms no longer enjoyed outside the garden. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Tanak) “LORD God” is used in discourses that express David’s special relationship with God as granted in the Davidic covenant (e.g., 2Sa 7:22, 25; 1Ch 17:16 – 17). Its only other occurrence in a narrative is in Jonah 4:6 (Witte, 58).

Genesis 2:4 – 6 describes the condition of the land (*haì,aìres*.) before the creation of humankind. In this respect it takes us back to 1:2. Its focus is on those parts of the land that were to be directly affected by the fall (3:8 – 24). The narrative points to the fact that before humankind was created (in 2:7), the effects of human rebellion and the fall had “not yet” been experienced in the land. In the subsequent narratives, each of the parts of the land described in vv.4 – 6 is specifically identified in terms of the effect of the fall of humankind.

The use of distinct terminology for the “shrub of the field” (*śîaḥ haśśādeh*) and “plant of the field” (*ʿēśeb haśśādeh*) suggests that they do not refer to the “vegetation” that sprouted on the third day of ch. 1, but rather that they anticipate the “thorns and thistles” (*ʿēśeb* and “plants of the field” *haśśādeh*, that are to come (in 3:18) as a result of the curse of the ground (Cassuto, 100 – 103). Similarly, when the narrative states that the Lord God had not yet “sent rain on the earth”

(*himṭîr . . . ʿal-hāʾāreṣ*, one senses an allusion to the flood narratives, at which time the Lord declares, "I will send rain on the earth" (*mamṭîr ʿal-hāʾāreṣ*, 7:4).

The reference to "no man to work the ground" (*laʿăbōd ʾet-hāʾădāmâ*, v.5) points to the time when the man and the woman were cast from the garden "to work the ground" (*laʿăbōd ʾet-hāʾădāmâ*, 3:23). Thus, as a prelude to the account of humankind's creation (v.7), we are told of the land that has been prepared for him: "streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground" (v.6). In the very selectivity of the description of that land, however, one can already see a time when humankind will be cast out of the garden to become an alien and a stranger on a foreign land. The very words describing the garden will find their echo in a future exile. So the author of this narrative does not dwell on the world before the fall. It is a world that will quickly pass away. Even the description of that world is cast as a prelude to the coming of another world, a world in which thorns and thistles will crowd out the divine blessing and humankind will have no recourse but to work the soil for their livelihood.

7 At first glance the description of the creation of humankind is significantly different from that of ch. 1. In ch. 2 the man is made ("fashioned") "from the dust of the ground" rather than (created) "in the image of God," as in ch. 1. No two descriptions could be more dissimilar. However, we should not overlook the fact that the topic of the "creation of the man" in ch. 2 is not limited merely to v.7. In fact, the topic of the creation of the man and the woman is the focus of the entire second chapter. What the author had stated as a simple fact in ch. 1 (human beings, as male and female, were created in God's likeness) is explained and developed throughout the narrative of ch. 2. We cannot contrast the depiction of the creation of humankind in ch. 1 with only one verse in ch. 2; we must compare it to the narrative in the whole of the chapter.

The first point the author is intent on making is that human beings, though special creatures made in God's image, are nevertheless creatures, like the other creatures God made. Man did not begin as a "heavenly creature"; he was made of the "dust [*<aìpaìr]* of the ground." In light of the special attention given to the creation of humankind in ch. 1, the emphasis in ch. 2 on their "creatureliness" is not without importance. The notion that the origin of humankind might somehow be drawn from a divine source is consciously excluded by this narrative. Man's origin is the dust of the ground.

One can also see in this picture of man's origin an anticipation of humankind's destiny after the fall, when they would return to the "dust" (*ʿāpār*, "soil," 3:19). In creation man arose out of the dust, but in the fall human beings return to the dust. The author thereby pictures the true nature of the contrast between the work of God and the work of humankind.

Chapter 2 makes a further contribution to our understanding of humankind's creation in God's image. This is seen in the author's depiction of the land and the garden prepared for humankind's habitation. The description of the garden of Eden deliberately foreshadows the tabernacle as it is described later in the Pentateuch. The garden, like the tabernacle, was the place where humankind could enjoy the fellowship and presence of God.

b. Preparation of the garden (2:8 – 14)

> [8]Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. [9]And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground — trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
> [10]A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. [11]The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. [12](The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) [13]The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. [14]The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

COMMENTARY

8 Chapter 2 devotes considerable attention to its description of the "garden." We must pay attention to the details. First, the Lord God planted the garden and "put" (*wayyāśem*, v.8) the man there. Later this is repeated (v.15), though, as we will see, in a slightly different, and meaningful, way. The garden was planted "in the east [*miqqedem*], in Eden." The word "Eden" (*ʿēden*) seems to refer to a specific place or a kind of place. In the Hebrew Bible "Eden" can mean "delight"; hence

we may assume the name was intended to evoke a picture of idyllic delight and rest.

The fact that the garden was “in the east” in Eden raises the question of its exact location. Elsewhere in Genesis the notion of “eastward” (e.g., *miqqedem*) is associated with separation from God’s presence (e.g., 3:24; 11:2; 13:11). Also, when the man and woman are expelled from the garden, the cherubim are placed “on the east side” (*miqqedem*, 3:24) of the garden of Eden, giving the impression that the garden itself was not in the east. This apparent difficulty in the coherence of the passage may account for the fact that in v.8 the garden is not called the “garden *of* Eden,” as it is elsewhere, but the “garden *in* Eden” (*gan-bᵉʿēden*). In other words, the garden was planted in a place called Eden, which was apparently to be taken as a location larger than the garden itself. If “in the east” is taken with reference to Eden, the garden was on its eastern side.

It is still unclear how the reference to “east” (*miqqedem*) in v.8 is to be associated with the other references to “east” in the subsequent narratives. One solution may be that of the early versions. *Tar-gum Onqelos* translates *miqqedem* as *milqadmin* (“long ago”) rather than as “eastward” (cf. the Vulgate’s *a principio*). Both meanings are possible for *miqqedem*. In any event, if a geographical direction is meant, the author is apparently establishing an important distinction between “east” and “west” that will become of great thematic importance throughout the remainder of the book (see below). For now we are given only a hint that the location of the garden and a place called Eden may be important.

9 – 10 There were beautiful, lush trees in the garden, including the elusive “tree of life” and the forbidden “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (v.9). A river ran through the garden and divided into four “headwaters” (v.10). The author gives special care in locating the rivers and describing the character of the lands through which they flowed. The lands were rich in gold and precious jewels (v.12). The narrative assumes that the locations and identity of these rivers are known to his readers, if not from firsthand experience of the geography of the ancient world, at least from their location with respect to other biblical sites. The author, of course, does not expect us to have a map of this part of the world but uses common reference points, such as rivers and names of people, to locate the garden for us.

Later biblical prophets saw a metaphorical connection between the garden of Eden and the land given to Abraham's "seed":

> Isaiah 51:3: "The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD."
> Eze 36:35: "This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden."
> Joel 2:3: "Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste."
> Zechariah 14:8: "On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem."
> Revelation 22:1 – 2: "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."

In NT times the notion of a garden "paradise" (the word used in the LXX for the garden of Eden) located it in the heavenly regions, as in Luke 23:43, "Jesus answered him, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." This notion persisted until Luther forwarded the view that the garden existed in a now unknown location in the ancient world. He distinguished between the paradise described in Genesis 2 and that described in the NT, and he rejected the allegorical interpretation of paradise. His position was that the original location of the garden of Eden, though known to Adam and his descendants, was obliterated by the devastating effects of Noah's flood. The geographical conditions of that region — including the rivers, which served as the borders of the garden — are no longer the same.

Luther's view carried the field throughout the whole of the period of orthodoxy and beyond. It closed the door to outright identification of the garden with existing geography but at the same time left open the possibility of seeking clues to its location among the existing geographical remains after the flood. The underlying assumption of Luther's view was that the four rivers originated in the garden, with each flowing out of the same source.

11 – 14 The physical location of the garden of/in Eden has long been a topic of debate. Two of the rivers mentioned in association with the garden can be identified with certainty: the Euphrates (*peraìt)* and the Tigris (*h.iddeqel*; v.14).

It is difficult to identify the other two, the “Pishon” (*pîšôn*) and the “Gihon” (*gîh.ôn*; vv.11, 13). Since the “land of Cush” (*ʾereṣ kûš*) is identified in the Bible as Ethiopia, the “Gihon” is commonly understood to be the river that passes through the land of Ethiopia. This suggests the author has in mind the “river of Egypt.”The land of “Havilah,” however, cannot be identified.

Note that the amount of description given to each of the four rivers is in inverse proportion to the certainty of the identification of each of the rivers. Thus, the writer seems to sense his readers will not readily be able to locate Pishon and Gihon. Most of his attention is given to the “Pis-hon” (v.11), but there is least certainty regarding that river’s identification and location. The author’s attention to detail regarding the two lesser-known rivers (e.g., the mention of gold and jewels in connection with the Pishon) may be tied to the parallels between the role of the garden and that of the tabernacle later in the Pentateuch.

An important detail in the description of the garden of Eden in ch. 2 is the close similarity between the appearance and role of the garden and that of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 – 27. We have already called attention to the similarities between the account of creation in ch. 1 (see comments) and the account of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 – 27. Thus it is no surprise to find that the “garden” planted by God in ch. 2 should also suggest similarities to the tabernacle. The poem of Balaam in Numbers 24:5 – 6 also draws a close association between Israel’s beautiful tent(s) and its gardens planted by the Lord along the river. The allusion is clearly to the garden in Genesis 2.

In a way similar to Balaam’s poem, the primary interest of the author of Genesis 2 lies in the description of the garden’s beauty and of the gold and precious stones to be found in the lands encompassed by the garden. If the purpose of such descriptions in the later literature is taken as a guide, the point of the description of the garden is to show the glory of God’s presence through the beauty of the physical surroundings. The garden is cast as a primordial meeting place between God and his image bearer, humankind.

The prophet Haggai later proclaimed the glory of God’s presence in the new temple with a description of the gold and precious metals of that temple (Hag 2:7 – 8): “ ‘I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is

mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty." So also John's description of the New Jerusalem stresses the gold and precious stones that picture the glorious presence of God among "his people" (Rev 21:3, 18 – 19): "The wall [of the New Jerusa-lem] was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone." The depiction of the garden as a primeval tabernacle of God, followed by the description of God's placing of humanity in the garden, bears a strong resemblance to the later establishment of the priesthood in the tabernacle (and the temple).

NOTES

8 The pluperfect translation of וַיִּטַּע (*wayyiṭṭaʿ*) — "Now the LORD God *had planted* a garden" — is not warranted by the immediate context or Hebrew syntax (see Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de L,Hebareu Biblique* [Rome: Pontifical Bible Institute, 1923], par. 118d; König, *Syntax* par. 142; S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1892], 84 – 89). The difficulty lies in the apparent conflict between this account and ch. 1, where the plants are first created and then humankind. The English translators have attempted to solve the problem by means of a past-perfect translation for *wayyiṭṭaʿ*.

Even if the past perfect were possible for the *waw*-consecutive form, which is grammatically improbable, the *waw* consecutive *wayyiṭṭaʿ* ("and he put") that follows it continues the action of כָּל עֵץ נֶחְמָד לְמַרְאֶה וְטוֹב לְמַאֲכָל (*kol-ʿēṣ neḥmad l'marʾeh wᵉṭôb l'maʾᵃkal*); that clause contains the reference to the creation of the man. Rather than attempting to sort out the relative chronologies of the two accounts, it is better to recognize that 2:4b – 14 is a summary of the events of ch. 1 and thus is not to be read in chronological harmony with it. The verses say simply that before there were any wild plants, before there was any rain, before man had to work the ground, God made man from the ground, planted a garden for him, and put him in the garden. After the description of the garden, the narrative gets underway in v.15 by returning to God's placing of man in the garden.

9 The expression בְּתוֹךְ הַגָּן (*bᵉtôk haggān*, should be understood as "every tree that

is beautiful and edible"; thus the garden is depicted as an orchard of fruit trees, not merely a garden of every kind of tree. The translation "all kinds of trees" (NIV) gives the erroneous impression that every type of tree was to be found in the garden. The syntax of v.9b suggests that there were two special trees to be found there, the "tree of life" and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In this verse the "tree of life" is said to be (*bᵉtôk hagān*). "in the middle of the garden"). In 3:3, however, it is the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" that is in the "middle of the garden" (*bᵉtôk hagān*). The natural inference from the larger context is that both trees were in the "middle of the garden."

c. Man's place in the garden (2:15 – 24)

15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work
it and take care of it. 16 And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are
free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17 but you must not eat from the tree
of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely
die."
18 The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make
a helper suitable for him."
19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the
field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he
would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that
was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the
air and all the beasts of the field.
But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the
man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the
man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made
a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to
the man.
23 The man said,
"This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man."
2:24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to
his wife, and they will become one flesh.

COMMENTARY

15 The author has already noted that God "put" (*wayyasìeam)* man in the garden (v.8b). In v.15 he returns to this point and recounts God's purpose for doing so. Two important points from v.15 are in danger of being obscured by the English translations. The first is the change (from v.8) in the Hebrew word for "put." Unlike v.8, where a common term for "put" is used, in v.15 the author uses a term (*wayyanniḥēhû*) he elsewhere reserves for two special uses: God's "rest" or "safety," which he gives to humanity in the land (e.g., Ge 19:16; Dt 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), and the "dedication" of something in the Lord's presence (Ex 16:33 – 34; Lev 16:23; Nu 17:4; Dt 26:4, 10). Both senses of the term appear to lie behind the author's use of the word in v.15. Man is "put" into the garden, where he can "rest" and be "safe," and man is "put" into the garden "in God's presence," where he can have fellowship with God (3:8).

A second point from v.15 that has often been overlooked in the early versions is the specific purpose for God's putting man in the garden. In the early versions man is "put" in the garden "to work it and take care of it" (*lᵉʿobdâ ûlᵉšomrâ*). Although that translation appeared as early as second century BC in the LXX, there are serious objections to it. First, the suffixed pronoun in the Hebrew text rendered "it" in English is feminine, whereas the noun "garden," which the pronoun refers to in English, is in Hebrew a masculine noun. Only by changing the pronoun to a masculine singular, as the LXX has done, can it have the sense it does in the early versions, namely "to work" and "to keep" the garden. Later in 3:23, "to work the ground" (*laʿᵃbōd*) is said to be a result of the fall, and the narrative suggests that the author intends such a punishment to be seen as an ironic reversal of man's original purpose (see comments on 3:22 – 24). If this is so, then "working" and "keeping" the garden do not provide a suitable contrast to "working the ground."

In the light of these objections, a more suitable and grammatically sound translation of the Hebrew *lᵉʿobdâ ûlᵉšomrâ* is "to worship and to obey" (Cas-suto, 122 – 23). That is, the man is put in the garden to worship God and to obey him (on the nature of the final *h*, see Notes). Man's life in the garden is to be characterized by worship and obedience; he is a priest, not a keeper of the garden. Such a reading not only answers the objections raised against the traditional English translation, it also suits the larger ideas of the narrative. Throughout ch. 2 the author has consistently and consciously developed the idea of man's "likeness" to God along the same lines as the major themes of the

Pentateuch as a whole, namely, the themes of worship and Sabbath rest. Humankind can enjoy fellowship with God, rest, and worship because they bear God's own likeness.

16 – 17 A further confirmation of understanding *lᵉʿobdâ ûlᵉšomrâ* as "to worship and to obey" is that in v.16 we read for the first time that "God commanded" (*wayᵉṣaw*) the man whom he had created. As in the rest of the Torah, enjoyment of God's good land is contingent on "keeping" (*lišmōr*) God's commandments (*miṣwōt*; cf. Dt 30:16). The similarity between this condition for enjoying God's blessing and that laid down for Israel at Sinai and in Deuteronomy is transparent. Indeed, one can hardly fail to hear in these words of God to the first man the words of Moses to Israel:

> See, I set before you today life and prosperity [blessing; lit., the good, *haṭṭôb*], death and destruction [calamity; lit., the evil, *hārāʿ*]. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep [*lišmōr*] his commands [*miṣwōtāyw*] decrees and laws; then you will live [*h.yh*] and increase [*rbh*], and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.
>
> But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient .. . you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. (Dt 30:15 – 18)

The inference of God's commands in 2:16 – 17 is that only God knows what is good *ṭôb* for humanity and only God knows what is not good (*rāʿ*) for them. To enjoy the "good," humankind must trust God and obey him. If they disobey, they will be left to decide for themselves what is good *ṭôb* and what is not good (*rāʿ*). While to our modern age such a prospect may seem desirable, to the author of Genesis it is the worst fate that could have befallen humankind, for only God knows what is good *ṭôb* for humanity.

18 – 24 Having put this in general terms in vv.16 – 17, in the remainder of ch. 2 the author turns to a specific example of God's knowledge of the "good": the creation of the woman. Not only has Genesis 1 stressed that God knows the good (e.g., "and God saw that it was good" (*ṭôb*), but now in the present narrative the creation of the woman has become the prime example of God's knowledge of the good. When he sees that man is *alone* (*lebaddô*), God says, man's being alone is not good (*lōʾ ṭôb*, v.18). What is "not good" is "being alone."

This passage does not suggest man had become lonely or that God thinks the

man needs a wife, though at the conclusion of this chapter God gives him a wife. Literally, what God says about the man is that it is his “aloneness” or solitude (*lebaddô*) that is not good. The man has no one “like himself ” (*kenegdô*) to help him, either in worship or any of the other joys afforded him in the garden. There is no one else who bears the divine image as he does; hence there is no one like him whose fellowship he can enjoy along with God’s. The man is not alone before God. He can enjoy God’s fellowship. Neither is God alone in this sense, for we have already heard him say, “Let *us* make man in *our* image” (1:26). What is “not good” about man’s condition is his not having another like himself as a helper.

Here, then, at the close of ch. 2, the author puts the final touches on his account of what it means for humankind to be made “in God’s image and likeness.” In the first chapter the author had intimated that humankind’s creation in the “image of God” entailed creation as male and female: “In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (1:27). In the narrative of the creation of the woman in ch. 2, the author returns to develop this theme by showing that humankind’s creation “in God’s image” entails a “partnership” (*ʿēzer kᵉnegdô*; NIV, “a suitable helper”) between a man and his wife. The “likeness” that the man and woman share with God in ch. 1 finds an analogy in the “likeness” between the man and his wife in ch. 2. Here also, as in ch. 1, humankind’s likeness to God is shown against the background of their distinction from the other creatures.

For the first time since the account of the creation of the man and the woman in ch. 1, there is divine deliberation (Wenham, 68). The plural “Let us make” (*naʿᵃśeh*, 1:26) is replaced by the singular “I will make” (*ʾeᵉśeh*, 2:18), perhaps because only the creation of the woman is envisioned. In ch. 1 the divine plurality found its analogy in the creation of “male and female,” just as here the divine singular is a reflection of the fact that now man is alone (2:18).

The divine intention for the woman is that she be a “partner,” an *<eìzer kenegdô* (2:18, 20). This expression term occurs only two times in the Bible, once at the beginning and once at the conclusion of the account of God’s making of the animals. The preposition *neged* means “in front of,” and with the further preposition *ke* means “corresponding to” (BDB, 617) or “exact correspondence” (Jacob, 94). The point of the narrative is that there is no helper among the animals that corresponds to man. A special act of creation — that of the woman

— is necessary.

In what sense was the woman created to be a “helper”? Augustine suggested she was to help in the task of bearing children (Delitzsch, 140). According to Delitzsch (ibid.), she was to help “till and keep” the garden. Westermann, 309, seeks a more comprehensive interpretation: the woman is to provide “support in a wide sense.” Although each of these approaches to the question has validity, in the light of the importance of blessing (“Be fruitful and increase”) in the creation of the man and the woman in 1:28, it appears most likely that the “help” envisioned is tied to the bearing of children.

Further support for that interpretation comes from the narrative in ch. 3. Not only does the woman’s punishment relate specifically to her role in bearing children (3:16), but also in the promise of the “offspring” (*zera<*, lit., “seed,” 3:15) there is an apparent wordplay on the woman’s role as a “helper” *Pe<esh*.

Just as at other crucial turning points in the narrative, when a new relationship is initiated (e.g., the covenant with Abraham, 15:12; the covenant with Jacob, 28:11), the recipient of God’s provision sleeps while God acts. Within these narratives the purpose of the sleep is not merely anesthetic, though in the present narrative that surely plays a part. As in the other narratives, the man’s sleep in the face of divine activity portrays a sense of passivity and acceptance of divine provision (cf. Ps 127:2).

Much discussion has centered on the mention of the “rib” from which the woman was created. At first glance nothing in the narrative seems to take up and develop this detail. It is difficult to say why the mention of the rib was included in the story. A homiletical midrash often quoted by commentators says, “Just as the rib is found at the side of the man and is attached to him, even so the good wife, the rib of her husband, stands at his side to be his helper-counterpart, and her soul is bound up with his” (Cassuto, 134). The same ambiguity lies in the last remark in 2:21: “And [he] closed up the place with flesh,” which is often taken as an attempt to preserve the beauty of the scene by summarily removing any images of bodily mutilation (cf. ibid.).

Finally, the man’s jubilant response — “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” — appears to go beyond the narrative account in vv.21 – 22, where there

is only mention of the “rib.” This last detail has prompted Cassuto to suggest that “he did not take the bone alone, as the exegetes usually understand the verse . . . the Creator took together with the bone also the flesh attached to it, and from the flesh He formed the woman’s flesh, and from the bone her bones” (134). Cassuto’s comment serves more to point out the nature of the problem than to solve it, though it points the way to a solution.

In the mention of “one of the ribs” (ʾaḥatmiṣṣaʿōtāyw) the narrative anticipates the words of the man — “bone of my bones [mēʿaṣāmay] — by the wordplay between “ribs” and “bones” (*ms*.*l*< reverses <*s*.*m*). Such a wordplay explains why the rib is first called “one of the ribs”(ʾaḥat miṣṣaʿōtāyw) and not simply “the rib” as in the next verse.

Moreover, in the mention of the closing of the “flesh” (bāśār) over the rib, the narrative further anticipates the response of the man in 3:23: “flesh [bāśār] of my flesh.” It appears, then, that in the mention of the rib from which the woman was created, no particular meaning is to be attached to the rib as such but rather to “the rib and the flesh” as showing the woman to be in substance the same as the man. Westermann’s statement regarding this narrative aptly describes its purpose: “Genesis 2 is unique among the creation myths of the whole of the Ancient Near East in its appreciation of the meaning of woman, i.e., that human existence is a partnership of man and woman” (232).

There can be no doubt that the author intended the account of the naming of the animals to be read as part of the story of the creation of the woman. This is made certain in v.20, where at the conclusion of the man’s naming of the animals the author remarks, “But for a human being [lāʾādām] no suitable helper was found.”The implication is that the author saw in man’s naming of the animals his search for a “suitable partner.” In recounting that no suitable partner had been found, the author has assured the reader that man was *not like* the other creatures. In contrast to this, the author records in graphic detail the words of the man when he discovers the woman like himself:“This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (v.23). The man, a human being, recognizes his unique likeness in the woman.

NOTES

17 In the rest of the Pentateuch, the expression מוֹת תָּמוּת (*môt tāmût*, "you will surely die") is an expression for the death penalty (cf. 20:7; Ex 31:14; Lev 24:16) — a pronouncement by a judge on one who has been condemned to die. In Lev 24:16, the sentence is to be carried out by stoning the guilty party. In the present narrative the verdict is carried out by expulsion from the garden and denial of access to the "tree of life" (3:22 – 24). The narrative thus suggests that humankind's "immortality" before the fall is not an inherent human characteristic but a gift from God realized as access to the tree of life (cf. 1Ti 6:16).

18 The expression עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ (*ʿēzer kenegdô*) has the sense of "a suitable helper." The specific sense of these terms should be drawn from the immediate context. That the woman (wife) is a "helper" (*ʿēzer*) is to be understood from the "commission" given to humankind in both 1:28 ("Be fruitful and increase in number") and 2:15 ("for worship and obedience"; see comments in loc.). The implication is that in both of these areas, the family and worship, the man stands in need of the woman's help. It is not good that he should be alone.

19 – 20 A straightforward reading of וַיִּצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים (*wayyiṣer yhwh ʾĕlōhîm* "And the LORD God formed") suggests that in ch. 2 the creation of the animals follows the creation of the man (but precedes the creation of the woman). In ch. 1, however, the animals are created first and then humankind (man and woman; vv.24 – 26). This has long been pointed to as evidence of an internal contradiction within the Genesis account of creation. The NIV has offered an untenable solution in its rendering of the *waw* consecutive in *wayyis.er* by a pluperfect: "Now the LORD God *had* formed." Not only is such a translation not possible (see the Hebrew grammars, Joulon, *Grammaire*, par. 118d; König, *Syntax*, par. 142; Driver, *Tenses in Hebrew*, 84ff.), but it misses the point of the narrative that the animals were created in response to God's declaration that it was not good that man should be alone (2:18).

Cassuto (129) has shown that the difficulty posed by the lack of coherence between the two accounts of the creation of man has a simple solution: only two kinds of animals are said to be created in 2:19, "the beasts of the field" (חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה, *ḥayyat haśśādeh*) and "all the birds of the air" (כָּל עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, *kol-ʿôp* yet in 2:20 Adam names three kinds of animals: "the livestock *haśśāmayim*)the birds of

the air and all the beasts of the field." Elsewhere in the Pentateuch (Lev 17:13), the "beasts of the field and the birds of the air" are distinguished from "the livestock" by the fact that they can be caught only by hunting. Thus "of all the species of beasts and flying creatures that had already been created and had spread over the face of the earth and the firmament of the heavens, the Lord God now formed particular specimens for the purpose of presenting them all before man in the midst of the Garden" (Cassuto, 129).

Such a reading of the text not only resolves the difficulty between the two accounts of man's creation, but it points out how carefully the Genesis narratives have been worked into the narratives of the Pentateuch as a whole. Both the LXX [הַבְּהֵמָה, *habbᵉhēmâ*], "yet, still") and the Samaritan Pentateuch (ἔτι [*eti*] = עֹד, "yet, still") show that Cassuto's explanation was sensed very early in the history of interpretation, that is, "The Lord God *again* fashioned animals from the ground. . . ."

24 The form of the verb (*yiqtol*) suggests that v.24 is to be understood as a comment of the writer (nar-rator) to the reader (cf. 32:33, W. Schneider).

B. The Land and the Exile (2:25 – 4:26)

1. Disobedience (2:25 – 3:7)

OVERVIEW

If ch. 2 portrays humankind's earliest environment as a "prototype" of God's gift of the "good land," then it should come as no surprise that the account of the fall is recorded in terms that anticipate Israel's eventual loss of the Promised Land via exile.

A more studied attempt to treat the problem of evil and temptation to sin cannot be found in all of Scripture. With few exceptions, the author has left the

reader completely alone with the events of the story and offers little reflection on the narrative. Unlike in ch. 1, there are no comments to guide the reader through the story. We are left to ourselves and our sense of the story for answers to the questions it raises. We must seek clues to the meaning of the story from the few signs of the author's own shaping of it.

a. The transition (2:25)

[25]The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

COMMENTARY

25 Verse 25 is clearly intended to link the account of the land and the blessing (1:1 – 2:24) with that of the fall (2:25 – 3:24). The reference to the "two of them" (NIV, "both") looks back to the previous narrative, while their description as "naked . . . and no shame" anticipates the central problem of the narrative that follows.

Two different but related words describe the "nakedness" of the man and his wife in the fall narrative. Apart from the obvious meaning of ʿārôm (“naked”; GK 6873), the nuanced sense of the word can be gained from the immediate context: "they were not ashamed." This choice of ʿārôm (“naked”) at the beginning of the narrative is likely motivated by two considerations. First, in the alliteration between ʿārôm and <*afÊrum* (“crafty,” 3:1), there is an obvious play on the two words. The effect is both to draw the reader into the story by providing an immediate connecting link with the previous narrative and to anticipate and thus help explain the events and outcome of the story that follows. This link provides an immediate clue to the potential relationship between the serpent's "cunning" and the innocence implied in the "nakedness" of the couple. The story unfolds the nature of that relationship.

Second, there is a difference in meaning between ʿārôm (“naked”) in 2:25 and ʿērōm (“naked”; GK 6567) in 3:7. While both terms occur infrequently in the Pentateuch, ʿērōm is distinguished by its use in Deuteronomy 28:48. There it depicts the state of exiles who are being punished for their failure to trust and obey God's word: "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness

[*ûbᵉʿēḏrōm*] and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the LORD sends against you." In distinguishing the first state of man's nakedness (<*afÊru*m) from the second (ʿ*ēḏrōm*), the author has introduced a subtle yet perceptible clue to the story's meaning. The effect of the fall is not simply that the man and the woman become aware of their "nakedness" (<*afÊro*m). Rather, they come to know that they are "naked" (<*fÊ*m) in the sense of being "under God's judgment" (cf. Dt 28:48; Eze 16:39; 23:29).

b. The tempter (3:1)

> [1]Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

COMMENTARY

1 The author discloses a small but important clue to the story by revealing an important detail about the snake: he was more "crafty" (<*afÊru*m; GK 6874) than any of the creatures. As a rule, <*afÊrum* is not a negative term elsewhere in the Bible. It usually suggests wisdom and adroitness. (Besides its use here, it occurs eight times in Proverbs and twice in Job.) The description of the serpent as "crafty" is in keeping with other features of this story that suggest the author is drawing a connection between the fall and the quest by humankind for wisdom. Their disobedience is depicted not so much as wicked as it is foolish. Humankind had all the necessary "good" (*ṭōhû wāḇōhû*) but wanted more, namely, to be like God.

The forbidden tree is the tree of knowing "good and evil" (*ṭôḇ wāraʿ*, 2:9). The woman took of the tree and ate because she "saw that the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom [*lᵉhaśkîl*]" (v.6). Thus the serpent represents the obtainment of a certain kind of wisdom (*ʿārûm*). Nevertheless, the serpent and his wisdom (*ʿārûm*) lead ultimately to the curse (*ʾārûr*, v.14).

The serpent is one of the "wild animals" *ʾārûr(ḥayyat* made by the Lord God (cf. 1:25; 2:19). The purpose of this statement is to exclude the notion that the serpent was a supernatural being (Procksch, 32). "The serpent is none other than a serpent" (Jacob, 102).

NOTE

1 The clause structure W + X + QATAL — וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה (*wᵉhannāḥāš hāyâ*, "Now the serpent was") indicates the start of a new section of narrative. Verse 1 gives the necessary background information for the following narrative. The WAYYIQTOL form in 2:25 also shows that the two clauses were understood together, as we have suggested in the commentary.

The מִן (*min*) preposition can have either a partitive sense ("subtil as none other of the beasts," GKC, par. 119w) or comparative ("subtil above all beasts of the field," BDB, 582), as reflected in the NIV's "more crafty than." In favor of the partitive sense is the use of *min* in v.14:"Cursed are you from [*min*] all the cattle and from all the beasts of the field" (my trans.). In v.14 it is the serpent that is cursed and not the other animals; so the comparative use of *min* is not suitable. The added phrase in v.14 — "from all the livestock" (*mikkol-habbᵉhēmâ*)— shows that the sense of the *min* is partitive in that verse ("cursed are you as none of the livestock and as none of the wild animals") so that according to v.1 the serpent was not included in both groups of animals but only among the "wild animals." The close ties between v.14 and v.1 suggest that the partitive sense of the *min* should be read there also.

The net effect of reading the *min* as a partitive is to suggest that the serpent was not in every respect an ordinary animal. It was not "craftier than" the other beasts of the field. Rather, it was crafty, "and the wild animals were not." Thus Westermann's statement (239) that "the serpent is not outside the circle of those already mentioned in the narrative" needs to be expanded to include the idea that the serpent was also not entirely within the circle of those already mentioned in the narrative. There is no mention yet of the identification of the serpent with Satan (as in later biblical texts), but the narrative has not closed the door on that possiblity, as some have supposed.

c. The temptation (3:2 – 7)

[2]The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the

garden, [3]but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’ ”
[4]“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. [5]“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”
[6]When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. [7]Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

COMMENTARY

2 – 5 The story of the temptation is told with subtle simplicity. The snake speaks only twice, but that is enough to offset the balance of trust and obedience between the man and the woman and their Creator. The centerpiece of the story is the question of “knowing good and evil” (*ṭôb wārāʿ*). The snake’s questions imply that God has been keeping something *from* the man and woman (v.5).

The early narratives in Genesis, however, have suggested just the opposite. Rather than keeping something *from* the man and woman, God has been keeping something *for* them, namely “the good” (e.g., 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:18). In suggesting that God has been keeping “the good” from humankind, the words of the snake directly challenge the central theme of the early narratives: God will provide the “good” *tôb* for human beings *if* they trust and obey God.

6 – 7 An important narrative clue highlights the beginning of the woman’s transgression.Even before she has eaten of the fruit, the woman is depicted as already usurping God’s role of “knowing what is good for them.” As she eyes the tree and its fruit, just moments before taking her first bite, we the readers are allowed to listen in on her thoughts, and, consequently, her underlying motives for disobeying God: (v.6) “the woman saw that the . . . tree was good” (*wattēreʾ hāʾiššâ kî ṭôb hāʿēṣ*). The reader of this narrative will surely recall that in Genesis 1 it was clearly God alone who “saw what was good” (*wayyarʾ kî ṭôb*). Now, instead of God, it is the woman who “saw what was good.”

It is then at this point in the narrative that the author raises the issue of the place of "wisdom" (*lehask*a *îl*) in knowing "what is good": "the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was . . . also desirable for gaining wisdom." In these brief thoughts of the woman we can see the temptation beginning to work its way into a transgression of God's will. The woman's thoughts show that this is not a question of rebellion. It is, on her part, simply a quest for wisdom. It is a quest for knowing "the good" apart from God's provision.

Having shown the temptation as a quest for "wisdom" apart from God, the story comes to an abrupt conclusion in its account of a double act of the transgression: "she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it" (v.6b). How quickly the transgression comes once the decision has been made! The thrust of the story, with all its simplicity, lies in the tragic and ironic view it gives of humanity's ill-fated quest for wisdom. Ironically, what the snake promised comes true: the man and the woman do become "like God" when they eat of the fruit. The irony lies in the fact that in their creation they were already "like God"; they had been created in his image (1:26).

In the temptation the serpent promises that the man and the woman will know "good and evil" (v.5), just as God knows "good and evil." Presumably the man and the woman believe they will obtain the knowledge of "good and evil" when they eat the fruit, but they seem to have assumed that their newfound knowledge will lead them only to enjoy the "good." The possibility that they will also know the "bad" and not the "good" is not raised in the narrative prior to their eating of the fruit.

Yet when they eat of the fruit and their eyes are opened, it is not the "good" they see and enjoy. Their new knowledge is only of their nakedness and consequent shame (*wayyēdᶜû kîᶜērūmmîm*, "and they realized they were naked," v.7). The coveted knowledge of "good and evil" that was to make them "like God" results only in the knowledge that they are no longer even like each other: they are ashamed of their nakedness, and they sew leaves together to hide their differences. Like the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, they seek wisdom but find only vanity and toil. As the next segment of the narrative shows, not only do the man and his wife cover their shame from each other, making clothing from the trees

of the garden, they also hide themselves from God at the first sound of his coming.

2. Judgment (3:8 – 20)

a. The scene (3:8)

> [8]Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

COMMENTARY

8 The judgment scene opens with the "sound" (or "voice," *qôl*) of the Lord. There is irony in the way this scene is depicted. The expression "the sound of the LORD God" (*qôl yhwh ʾĕlōhîm*) occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuch, especially in Deuteronomy (5:25; 8:20; 13:18; 15:5; 18:16; 26:14; 27:10; 28:1, 2, 15, 45, 62; 30:8, 10), where along with the verb "to hear/obey" and the preposition *bᵉ* (*šāmaʿ bᵉqôl yhwh ʾĕlōhîm*) it expresses the Lord's call for obedience: "You shall obey the voice of the LORD God." It can hardly be without purpose that the author opens this curse scene with a subtle but painful reminder of the single requirement for obtaining God's blessing: "obedience to the voice of the LORD God" (*lišmōʿ ʾet-qôl yhwh ʾĕlōhênû*; cf. v.8).

The coming of the Lord to Mount Sinai is also foreshadowed in this scene of the Lord God's coming to the first disobedient couple. In Deuteronomy 5:25 and 18:16 (cf. Ex 20:18 – 21), when the Lord came to Sinai, the people "heard the sound of the LORD our God" (*lišmōʿ ʾet-qôl yhwh ʾĕlōhênû*). The response of Adam in the garden is much the same as Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. When they heard the sound of the Lord at Sinai, they were afraid "and stayed at a distance and said . . . 'Do not have God speak to us or we will die' " (Ex 20:18 – 19). When Adam and his wife hear the sound of the Lord in the garden, they also fear and attempt to hide.

The phrase "wind of the day" (v.8, lit. trans.) is often taken as an indication of

the time of the Lord's visit, that is, in "the cool of the day" or "the time of the evening." The text says only "at/in the wind of the day" (cf. Jer 13:24:"I will scatter them like chaff in the wind of the wilderness"). There is nothing in the context to suggest this expression refers to a time of day. In light of the general context of the picture of God's coming in judgment and power, the "wind" (*rûah*.) envisioned by the author is more likely intended to resemble that "great and powerful wind" (*rûaḥ gᵉdōlâ wᵉḥāzāq*) that blew on the "mountain . . . of the LORD" in 1 Kings 19:11. Thus the viewpoint of the narrative is much the same as that of Job 38:1, where the Lord answered Job "out of the storm."

It is not without significance that the author calls the reader's attention to their hiding place. They flee to the trees. Throughout this chapter and the previous one, the trees play a central role in depicting man's changing relationship with God. First, in chs. 1 and 2 the (fruit) trees are signs of God's bountiful provision. Then, at the beginning of ch. 3, the trees are the ground for inciting the man and woman to rebellion and the place where the rebels seek to hide from God. Finally, when the man and the woman are cast from of the garden, their way is barred from "the way to the tree of life" (v.24). The full extent of the author's focus on trees in this chapter must be understood in light of the role of the tree as the place of punishment of death (Dt 21:22 – 23). This may be viewed in the light of the role taken on by the tree as the place of giving life (Pr 3:18; 13:12; 15:4; Rev 2:7; cf. Gal 3:13).

NOTE

8 The expression קוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים מִתְהַלֵּךְ בַּגָּן (*qôl yhwh ʾlōhîm mithallēk baggān*) can be read in two ways. It may refer to the "sound" made by the LORD's walking through the garden (e.g., "the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden," NIV), or it may refer to the "voice" of the Lord that echoed (*mithallēk*; cf. Jer 46:22) throughout the garden. In the latter view the "sound" (*qôl*) can refer to the actual "voice" of God or, as in Deuteronomy 5:25, to the "noise" of a theophany, e.g., thunder (cf. Ex 20:18).

The statement of the man in v.10 —"I heard you [*qōlᵉkā*, lit., 'your voice'] in the garden" — suggests that the "sound" they heard was not the sound of the Lord's footsteps; also, the fact that it is only in v.9 that the narrative says, "But the

LORD God called," suggests that the "sound" in v.8 is not yet the sound of his voice (Cassuto, 151). The close association between this passage and other theophanies in Scripture supports the interpretation that sees the "sound of the LORD God" as part of a theophany.

b. The trial (3:9 – 13)

> [9]But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"
> [10]He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."
> [11]And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"
> [12]The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."
> [13]Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"
> The woman said,"The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

COMMENTARY

9 – 13 Before meting out judgment, God's only words to the rebellious man and woman come in the form of questions: "Where are you?" (v.9); "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?" (v.11); "What is this you have done?" (v.13). The picture of God's questioning before his act of judgment recalls the proceedings of a court session much like that of 4:9 – 10: "Where is your brother Abel? . . . What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out [*ṣōʿqîm*] to me from the ground"; and 18:21: "I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry [*hakiʿṣaʿqāṭâ*] that has reached me."

Skillfully, by repeating the word "naked" (vv.7, 10 – 11), the author allows the man to be convicted with his own words: "I was afraid because I was naked" (*ʿêrōm*, v.10). Then, as though to show that alienation between the man and the woman go far beyond the shame that each now feels in the presence of the other, the author recounts the petty attempt on the man's part to cast blame on the woman ("she gave me," v.12) and, obliquely, on God ("the woman *you* put here with me"). In the man's words there is an ironic reminder of God's original

intention: “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (2:18). As an index of the extent of humankind’s fall, the man now sees God’s good gift, the woman, as the real source of his trouble.

c. The verdict (3:14 – 20)

OVERVIEW

Although much could be said about the curse on the snake, the woman, and the man, very little is actually written. The passage is typical of the kind of artful composition one finds throughout Genesis. There are no long discourses on the appearance of the snake before and after the curse. Did he have feet? Did he have wings? The thoughts of the snake, if there were any, or the thoughts of the man and woman are given little attention. The narrative gives little or no help in understanding their plight as individuals. The snake, the woman, and the man are not depicted as involved in a personal crisis of their own. Rather, they come to us as representatives of humanity as a whole. This is not so much their story as it is ours, the story of humankind.

With great skill the author presents these participants as the “heads” of their race. The snake, on the one hand, and the man and the woman, on the other, are as two great peoples embarking on a long struggle, a struggle that will find its conclusion only in the coming of a distant redeemer.

> 14So the LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this,
> “Cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals!
> You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life.
> 15And I will put enmity between you and the woman,
> and between your offspring and hers;
> he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”
> 16To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;
> with pain you will give birth to children.
> Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”
> 17To Adam he said,“Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’
> “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it

all the days of your life.
[18]It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.
[19]By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken;
for dust you are and to dust you will return."
[20]Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living.

COMMENTARY

14 – 15 Whereas the snake had been "crafty" (ʿārûm, v.1), he is now "cursed" (ʾārûr, v.14) — the most cursed of the animals. It is his "curse" that distinguishes him "above all the livestock and all the wild animals." What this means in the immediate context is that he must "crawl on [his] belly and . . . eat dust all the days of [his] life" (v.14). The curse does not imply that the snake had previously walked with feet and legs as the other animals. For the rest of his years, as a result of the curse, the snake will crawl on his belly, as snakes do, and he will "eat dust." The expression "eating dust" suggests "total defeat" (cf. Isa 65:25; Mic 7:17).

The curse of the snake for his part in the fall is to be a perennial reminder of the defeat of the rebellious "seed." So strongly is the imagery of the snake's defeat felt by later biblical writers that in their description of the ultimate victory and reign of the righteous "seed," when peace and harmony are restored to creation, they stress that the serpent will continue in his role as the defeated enemy: "dust will [still] be the serpent's food" (Isa 65:25).

As representatives, the snake and the woman embody the fate of their seed. The fate of their seed is their fate as well. The author has established the "headship" of the snake and the woman by a careful identification of the snake and his "seed." Initially in v.15, "enmity" is established between the snake and the woman and between the "seed" of the snake and the "seed" of the woman. In the second half of v.15, the "seed" of the woman is one ("he") who will crush the head of the snake ("your head"), bringing to an end the curse it brought on humanity.

The woman's "seed" is presented as one who lies in the distant future. Yet it is this same "seed" who is to crush the head of the snake. The crushing blow against the serpent will not be against the "seed" of the snake but against the snake itself. The seed of the woman will crush *the snake's* head. The snake is thus the enemy of the woman's seed. In the end it is the snake, not his seed, whose head the seed of the woman must crush.

The author views the snake in terms that extend beyond a particular snake of the garden. The snake is representative of someone or something else. This implies that there is more in this brief passage than initially meets the eye. A plot is set in motion that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his "seed." It is what the snake and his "seed" represent that lies at the center of the author's focus. With that "one" lies the "enmity" that must be crushed.

No attempt is made to answer the question of the snake's role in the temptation over against the role of a higher being, e.g., Satan. That was, however, the nature of the drama later biblical writers saw in this story (cf. Ro 16:20; Rev 12:9: "That ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray"). Judging from the details of the story, such a reading might not lie too far from that of the author. In the last analysis the reader is left alone to understand the story. All one has to go on are the words spoken by God to the snake. It is a momentous moment in Genesis, and it is unlikely that at such a moment the author is interested in no more than humankind's proverbial fear of snakes.

Looking at the passage within the larger scope of the book and the pains taken by the author to construct a narrative out of just these small segments of discourse, much more surely lies behind these words. They are, after all, God's first statements to the first sinner. In light of the fact that similar programmatic discourses are strategically placed throughout the remainder of the book, it seems probable that the author intended these words also to be read as programmatic and foundational to the plot and characterization of the book as a whole. In the narrative that follows, there will be similar battles to be fought ("enmity"). The two sides represent two seeds, the "seed" of the snake and the "seed" of the woman. In the ensuing battles a "seed" of the woman will crush the head of the snake. Though wounded in the struggle, the woman's "seed" will

prove victorious.

Verse 15 thus contains a puzzling yet centrally important question: Who is the "seed" of the woman? The purpose of his verse is not to answer that question but to raise it. The remainder of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch gives the author's answer.

16 The judgment against the woman relates first to her children and then to her husband. She will now bear children in increased pain or toil (*ʿāṣḇôn*) will be for her husband, and he will "rule over" her. The sense of this divine word within the larger context of the book lies in the role of the woman that is portrayed in chs. 1 and 2. The woman and her husband were to have enjoyed the blessing of children (1:28) and the harmonious partnership of marriage (2:18, 21 – 25). God's words of judgment relate to these two points. What was to be the woman's source of blessing — to be a marriage partner and have children — is now tainted by the curse. In those moments of life's greatest blessing — marriage and children — the woman will feel most painfully the consequences of her foolish act.

One should note carefully the relationship this narrative establishes between the promise of v.15 and the words to the woman in v.16. In the promise of v.15 the final victory will be accomplished by the "seed" of the woman. In the beginning, at the creation of the man and woman, childbirth lay at the center of the blessing bestowed on them by their Creator ("Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth," 1:28). After the fall, childbirth becomes the means by which the snake is defeated and the blessing restored. The pain of every birth is a reminder of the hope that lies in God's promise. Birthpangs are not merely a reminder of the futility of the fall; they are a sign of an impending joy:

> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. (Ro 8:22 – 24; cf. Mt 24:8)

17 – 20 The "good land" provided by the Creator (chs. 1 – 2) is cursed. Human beings can no longer "freely eat" of the fruits of the land. In chs. 2 and 3 the author closely charts humanity's continuing relationship with their Creator by indexing it to the theme of "eating" (*ʾākal*). As the story begins, God's

blessing and provision are signaled by the words, “you are free to eat [ʾākōl tōʾkēl, from any tree in the garden.” Those words recall the good gifts in ch. 1 and the concluding affirmation that all was then “very good” (1:31). The issue in ch. 3 is once again “eating” (,*aìkal*). By posing the question of what the man and woman can and cannot eat, the tempter raises doubts about God’s goodness and care for them (3:1 – 3). Finally, the humans’ act of disobedience in ch. 3 is narrowed down simply, and thoughtfully, to the repetition of the single word “to eat”: “she *ate* it [*wattōʾkal*] .... and he *ate* it [*wayyōʾkal*]” (v.6).

It is not surprising, then, that the author calls attention to “eating” in describing the divine judgment on the man: “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it [*tōʾkᵉlennâ*] all the days of your life” (v.17). The focus on “eating,” which seems to dominate the author’s depiction of the fall, is related to the author’s interest elsewhere in the importance of “eating” and its association with the relationship of humankind to God. The Pentateuch’s own teaching is tied to clean and unclean food (Lev 11; Dt 14) and to regulations for annual “feasts” (Lev 23) to celebrate God’s covenantal gift of the “good land.” To this can be added the role and importance of “feasts” and “eating” in the biblical eschaton (see Rev 19:9; cf. SBK, 4:2, 1154o).

The description of the “land” in v.18 (“you will eat the plants of the field,” <*es*m*ea*b *has*s*aa*a *d*ì *eh*) is a reversal of the state of the land as it was described in ch. 2: “No shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field [<*es*m*ea*b *has*s*aa*a *d*ì *eh*] had yet sprung up” (2:5). In drawing a contrast between the condition of the “land” (*ha*ì,*aìres*.) before and after the fall, the author suggests that the present condition of the land is not the way it was intended to be. The present condition of the land is the result of humankind’s rebellion. The author thus paves the way for a central motif in the world of biblical eschatology: the hope of “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1; cf. Isa 65:17; Ro 8:22 – 24).

Verse 18 shows the reversal of the condition of the “land” before and after the fall. The next verse (v.19) reverses humankind’s condition. Before the fall man was created from the ground and given the “breath of life” (2:7). As a result of the fall, humankind must return to the ground and the soil (“dust”) from which they were taken (3:19). In these reversals the author suggests that the death sentence (2:17) has now fallen over God’s good creation.

As a constant reminder of the effect of the fall, a connection is drawn between the man's name, "Adam" (*ʾādām*, v.20), and the "ground" (*ʾᵉdāmâ*, v.19) from which he was taken. Adam then names his wife Eve, "because she would become the mother of all the living." This is the second time Adam names his wife (cf. 2:23). Her first name pointed to her origin ("out of man"), whereas her second name points to her destiny ("the mother of all the living").

NOTES

14 – 19 The divine words to the three guilty individuals are written as a single syntactical unit. It begins with the *waw* consecutive — וַיֹּאמֶר (*wayyōʾmer*, "and [the LORD God] said") — and follows with an 0 + X + QATAL — אֶל הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר (*ʾel hāʾiššâ ʾāmar*, "To the woman he said") — and then a W + X + QATAL — וּלְאָדָם אָמַר (*ûlʾādām ʾāmar* "To Adam he said").

16 The expression עִצְּבוֹנֵךְ וְהֵרֹנֵךְ (*ʿiṣṣᵉbônēk wᵉhērōnēk*, "your pains in childbearing") is a hendiadys: (lit.) "your pain and your conception."

The word תְּשׁוּקָה (*tᵉšûqâ*, "longing"; GK 9592; NIV, "desire") is "unusual and striking" (BDB, 1003). Apart from 3:16, it occurs only in Genesis 4:7 and Song of Songs 7:10. Its use in the Song of Songs shows that this "longing" can refer to physical attraction. In Genesis 4:7 the "longing" has the sense of a desire to overcome or defeat another. It is unwise to read too much into the word itself. The whole of this section of the curse ("Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you") finds an echo in the Lord's words to Cain in 4:7 ("it desires to have you but you must master it"); this suggests the author intended the two passages to be read together.

If so, the sense of "desiring" in 3:16 should be understood as the wife's desire to overcome or gain the upper hand over her husband. In the same way, the sense of *yimšol-bāk* is, as in the NIV, "he will rule over you." Within the context of the creation account in chs. 2 and 3, this last statement stands in sharp contrast to the picture of the man and the woman as "one flesh" (*lᵉbāśār ʾeḥād*, 2:24) and the picture of the woman as a "helper suitable for him" (*ʿēzer kᵉnegdô*, 2:18). The fall has had its effect on the relationship of the husband and wife.

20 The name “Eve” (חַוָּה, *ḥawwâ*) is a wordplay on the Hebrew word for “life” (חַי, *ḥay*). Ironically, in this same section of text the man and his wife are forbidden access to the “tree of life [*haḥayyîm*]” lest they “live [*h.ay*] forever” (v.22).

3. Protection (3:21)

21The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

COMMENTARY

21 In striking contrast to God’s rest in ch. 2, after God’s judgment of the man and woman, the narrative returns to God at work: “The LORD God made [*wayyaʿaś*]a garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.” After — and because of — the fall, there is still work to be done. The specification of the type of clothing that God makes — “garments of skin [<*ôr*],” i.e., tunics — recalls the nakedness of the man and woman before the fall: they “were both naked [*ʿărûmmîm*], and they felt no shame” (2:25). There may also be some hint of the sacrificial slaying of the animals in making these garments of skin.

In the laws of the Pentateuch the people are instructed to make tunics for the priests who enter God’s presence at the tabernacle. The tunics are to cover the priests’ nakedness (ʿerwâ) lest they incur guilt and die (Ex 28:42). The author may be anticipating this “lasting ordinance” (28:43) in drawing attention to the importance of covering the nakedness of the man and the woman. The role of the priests as developed in the Pentateuch is thus foreshadowed in God’s past work — his work of restoring to man the blessing of his presence and fellowship.

4. Exile (3:22 – 24)

22And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” 23So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which

he had been taken. [24]After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

COMMENTARY

22 – 23 The sentence of death now leveled against the man and the woman consists of being cast out of the garden and being barred from the tree of life. The penalty is later taken up as part of the Mosaic law: to "be put to death" (*môt yûmāt* lit., "he shall surely die") is to be "cut off from [one's] people" (Ex 31:14). The transgression of Adam and Eve means they will be cast off from the protection of the garden (cf. Ge 4:14).

The author uses irony to show man's fall and his folly. The man and the woman sought to "be like God" (vv.5 – 7). Their goal was obtained but, ironically, proves undesirable. The man and woman, who were created "like God" in the beginning (1:26), find themselves after the fall to be "like God," but curiously no longer "like God" in the same way. Their original likeness was the basis of their fellowship with God in the garden (v.22). Their newly acquired "likeness to God" means their being cast out of God's presence. In the subtle verbal interchanges of this passage, the author shows that humankind's happiness (*ṭôb*, "good") does not rest in being "like God" so much as being "with God," that is, enjoying the blessings of God's presence (Ps 16:11).

To underscore the reversals that humankind suffers as a result of rebelling, the author again resorts to a wordplay. In 2:15 the man was put into the garden for "worship" (*ʿobdâ*) and "obedience" (*šomrâ*); but here in v.23, after the fall, the man is cast out of the garden "to work [*laʿbōd*] the ground" and "is kept" (*šōmēr*; NIV,"to guard") from "the way to the tree of life" (v.24).

24 In depicting the garden and the tree of life, the author anticipates God's plan for blessing in the Sinaitic covenant. The tree of life stands guarded by the "cherubim"— just as in the Sinaitic covenant the ark is guarded by the "cherubim" (Ex 25:10 – 22; cf. Dt 31:24 – 26). Only through the covenant can humankind's fellowship with God be restored: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I [the LORD] will meet

with you and give you all my commands" (Ex 25:22). In the covenant humankind is returned to the state man originally enjoyed in Genesis 2:15, that is, as one who serves, obeys, and enjoys the blessing of God.

The mention of the direction "east" is an important detail. Throughout the book of Genesis the author carefully apprises the reader of the direction of humankind's movement and in doing so often leaves an important narrative clue to the meaning of the events being recounted. At this point in the narrative, "east" has only the significance of "outside the garden." Later on, the notion of "east" will suggest that humankind is moving in the direction of "Babylon" (11:2) and the "cities of Sodom and Gomorrah" (13:11). To return "from the east" is to return to the city of "peace" ("Salem," 14:17 – 20).

C. Life in Exile (4:1 – 26)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 4 offers a brief glimpse of life outside the garden of Eden. The woman bears two sons (cf. 3:16). They become farmers (workers of the ground; cf. 3:23) and shepherds (tenders of sheep). The narrative assumes the effects of the fall in ch. 3 ("by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food"). The chapter is framed by the accounts of the births of Adam's sons/dsecendants at the beginning (vv.1 – 2), in the center (vv.17 – 22), and at the conclusion (vv.25 – 26). Many diverse elements are recounted within the small space of this one chapter, making it a transition and staging narrative connecting earlier events to those that follow.

On the basis of Jude 11 ("Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain") and Hebrews 11:4 ("By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did"), Cain is frequently seen as a "type" of godless humanity and Abel as a "type" of the spiritual man (cf. *The Scofield Bible*, 8, nn. 3 – 4; Augustine: "Cain then was the first-born . . . who belonged to the city of men; Abel . . . belonged to the city of God," *City of God* 15.1). Whatever the value of such a reading of these narratives, they should not cause us to overlook other indications that Cain is an

example of repentance and forgiveness. The central question of the narrative lies in Cain's words in 4:13, "my iniquity is too great to bear" (see comments below). If these words express remorse and repentance, Cain's life follows a path of repentance and forgiveness. Cain's city (v.17) and the line of Cain's descendants (vv.17 – 24) are thus cast in a new light.

1. Worship (4:1 – 8)

[1]Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to
Cain. She said, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man.”
[2]Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.
Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. [3]In the course of time
Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. [4]But
Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The
LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, [5]but on Cain and his
offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face
was downcast.
[6]Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face
downcast? [7]If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do
not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you,
but you must master it.”
[8]Now Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go out to the field.” And while
they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 Eve’s words after the fall raise important questions. First, what do they mean? If we understand them as, “With the help of the LORD I have brought forth [or ‘acquired’] a man” (v.1), we can read her words in a positive light. She acknowledges God’s help and appears hopeful that the promise of a “seed” to crush the head of the serpent (3:15) might find its fulfillment in this son. But her words can also have a less positive meaning. She might be saying, “Just as the Lord created a man, so have I created a man” (Cassuto, 196). Taken this way, Eve’s words are a boastful attempt to make herself “like God.” Just as the Lord created a man, so now she has created one. She has become like God. Within the immediate context alone it is difficult to decide between these two diverse readings of the passage. Two considerations, however, suggest the likelihood of the latter interpretation of Eve’s words.

First, there is a recurring theme throughout many of the narratives in Genesis, namely, the attempt and failure of human effort in obtaining the blessing that only God can give. God promises humankind a blessing, and human beings push

it aside in favor of their own attempts to obtain blessing. The story of the building of the city of Babylon (ch. 11) is a well-known example of this. In particular, Eve's situation brings to mind Sarah's attempt to fulfill God's blessing through her handmaiden Hagar. Just as Sarah tried to bring about the fulfillment of God's promised "seed" (16:1 – 4) on her own, so also Eve's words give expression to her confidence in her ability to fulfill the promise of 3:15.

The second consideration is Eve's later words about the birth of Seth ("God has granted me another child [*zera<*, lit., 'seed'] in place of Abel," v.25). These words cast considerable light on her words in v.1. The contrast between her words at the beginning of the narrative and at the conclusion is striking and revealing. At the beginning Eve says, "I have brought forth a man [*,îš*]," whereas at the close of the narrative she acknowledges, "God has granted me another seed [*zera<*]." Eve does not say that Seth is given to replace Cain. Rather, Seth replaces Abel. The story is not about Eve's hope in Cain but in Abel. True to the plot of the remaining narratives in Genesis, Cain, the older son, does not stand to inherit the blessing, but rather the younger son. It is God himself who provides another "seed" (*zera<*) through yet another son.

3 – 4 In light of the parallels between the scene in 3:21 – 24 and the worship of God in the Sinaitic covenant (see above), it is appropriate that the author turns immediately to the question of God's acceptance of Cain and Abel's "offering" (*minh.â*) and their worship of God. The author's purpose is to use the narrative of Cain and Abel to teach an important lesson on worship. What kind of worship is pleasing to God? Worship pleasing to God is a worship that springs from a pure heart.

How does this narrative teach a lesson about a pure heart? It does so by allowing the reader to see, behind the scenes, Cain's response to God's rejection. In his response we see the kind of heart that lies behind an unaccepted offering. Cain's worship is unacceptable. Abel's worship is acceptable. The difference between the two offerings is not drawn out by the author.

Contrary to the popular opinion that Cain's offering is not accepted because it is not a blood sacrifice, the narrative suggests that both offerings, in themselves, are acceptable — they are both described as "offerings" (*mibb<kōrōt* and not "sacrifices" (*zebah*.); hence the issue is not the use of blood. In addition, the

narrative suggests the offerings are both "firstfruits" offerings (*mibbe kofÊrot*, v.4); as a farmer, Cain's offering of "fruits of the soil" (v.3) is appropriate for his occupation, just as Abel's "firstborn of his flock" (v.4) is for his occupation as a shepherd.

5 – 7 In our attempts to discover what is wrong or missing with Cain's offering, we should not overlook the important fact that even the author does not provide an explanation but rather leaves to the reader the task of judging the two offerings. The author is apparently less concerned with Cain's offering than with Cain's response to the Lord's rejection of his offering. Whatever the cause of the rejection, the narrative itself focuses our attention primarily on Cain's response. It is Cain's response that reveals what was wrong with his offering; that is his point.

Cain's response is twofold: (1) anger against God (v.4b) and (2) anger against his brother (v.8). By focusing on Cain's anger instead of his offering, the author frontloads his lesson on "pleasing offerings" with a subtle warning: "by their fruit you will know them" (Mt 7:20). The author's understanding of the centrality of a pure heart in worship shows an affinity with the prophet Jeremiah, who uttered words against the false and hypocritical worshipers of his day. Jeremiah pleaded with his compatriots "to do well [*ʾim-hêṭêb têṭîbû*; NIV, 'if you really change'] . . . and not shed innocent blood," lest they be exiled from their land (Jer 7:5 – 7). In the present narrative God likewise pleads with Cain to "do well" (*ʾim-têṭîb*) or face the consequences of shedding innocent blood and suffering exile from the land (v.7; cf. v.12).

8 Elements in this narrative suggest that the author may have intended it to be read alongside the Deuteronomic legislation of the "cities of refuge." There is, for example, a marked similarity between the description of Cain's offense against Abel and the details of the description of an intentional homicide in Deuteronomy 19:11. The similarity appears to play into the purpose of the author. According to Deuteronomy, the cities of refuge were to ensure that "innocent blood will not be shed in your land" (Dt 19:10). That, of course, is the central theme of the story about Cain and Abel: "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground" (v.10).

In setting out the various types of offenses for which the "cities of refuge"

were to be used, Deuteronomy 19:11 specifies the kind of crime that marks one as guilty of murder, namely, the one who lies in wait for his neighbor, “rises up” (*wᵊqām*; NIV, “assaults”) against him, and slays him. Cain’s offense is described along these same lines in Genesis 4: “while they were in the field, Cain attacked [*wayyāqom*, lit., ‘arose up (against)’] Abel and killed him” (v.8). The similarity between the phrasing of the law in Deuteronomy and the description of Cain’s action in this narrative suggests that Cain’s offense was deliberately cast as a violation of the Deuteronomic law.

According to Deuteronomy’s code of laws, Cain’s offense is punishable by death — he arose up against Abel and killed him. The facts that God shows mercy to Cain and that God’s mercy is linked to Cain’s building of a city suggest a more than coincidental relationship between the story of Cain and the Deuteronomic legislation of the cities of refuge. Not only is Cain’s offense punishable by death, but also the city that he built (v.17) is pictured as a kind of early city of refuge. It is not uncommon for the biblical author to ground the Mosaic legislation in God’s past deeds (cf. Ge 3:2 – 3; 8:20 – 21).

NOTES

1 – 2 The syntax of וְהָאָדָם יָדַע (*wᵊhāʾādām yādaʿ*, lit., “And Adam knew”) (W + X + QATAL) suggests the beginning of a new section; that is, vv.1 – 2 give the background for the events of the narrative that follow. The fact that Cain is described as one who “works the ground” (עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה, *ʿōbēd ʾᵃdāmâ*; NIV, “worked the soil”) suggests that the time period is subsequent to the expulsion of the man and woman at the close of ch. 3 (v.23). Thus, though the narrative states that Cain “went out from the LORD’s presence” (v.16) and “lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden,” we should not assume that he was still living in the garden of Eden.

The woman’s use of קָנִיתִי (*qānîtî*) for “I have brought forth” is motivated by the wordplay on the name of the first son, “Cain” (קַיִן, *qayin*). But why does she say, “I have brought forth a man [אִישׁ, *ʾîš*]” and why does she add, “with . . . the LORD” (אֶת־יְהוָה, *ʾet-yhwh*)? If, as is suggested in the commentary, Eve’s words mean that she sees this birth as an attempt to rival God’s intended blessing, the choice of the word *ʾîš* can be explained with reference to the creation of the woman in ch. 2. The use of *ʾîš* reverses the wordplay of *ʾîš* and *ʾiššâ* (אִשָּׁה, hV;ai, “woman”) in 2:23. A wordplay between *ʾîš* and *ʾnôš* (אֱנוֹשׁ, “Enosh,” 4:26) may also lie behind

the choice of words here. Thus a literary connection is established between the first son born (*,îš*) in the chapter and the last son (*ʾnôš*).

The modern translation “with the help of the LORD” (NIV) — which would seem to require עִם יְהוָה (*ʿim-yhwh*, “with the LORD”) rather than אֶת־יְהוָה (*ʾet-yhwh*, lit., “the LORD”) — makes good sense; but according to Westermann, 291, such a meaning is not attested elsewhere in Scripture. If וְאֵת שַׁדַּי (*wəʾēt*, “the Almighty”) is correct in Genesis 49:25, however, there may be some evidence there for the sense of “with the help of ” for the preposition *,et*.

3 *The Scofield Bible* (10 – 11) represents the popular view that Cain’s offering was faulted because it was not a blood sacrifice: “Cain’s unbloody offering was a refusal of the divine way,” or “His [Abel’s] sacrifice, in which atoning blood was shed (Heb. 9:22), was therefore at once his confession of sin and the expression of his faith in the interposition of a substitute (Heb. 11:4).” However, the word מִנְחָה (*minḥâ*, “offering”; GK 4966) refers to any type of offering, whether grain or animal. By itself *minh.â* would not imply that the offering should be a slaughtered animal, as would זֶבַח (*zebaḥ*; GK 2285). KB (251) describes זֶבַח as “an offering of sheep, goat, cattle, the aim of which is communion between the giver of the offering and the deity to whom the offering is given.”

Since Cain was a farmer, his *minh.â* was appropriately from the “fruits of the soil”; and since Abel was a shepherd, his *minh.â* was appropriately from “the firstborn of his flock.”The fact that the writer of Hebrews (11:4) refers to Cain and Abel’s offerings as a θυσία (*thysia*) does not imply that he saw them as blood sacrifices. The LXX also renders *minh.â* in Genesis 4:3 – 4 with θυσία. The LXX distinguishes between the *minh.â* (= *thysia*) of Cain and the *minḥâ* (= δῶρον, *dōron*, “gift”) of Abel, but *thysia* does not represent a “blood sacrifice.”

8 The standard Hebrew texts have simply, “And Cain spoke [וַיֹּאמֶר, *wayyōʾmer*] to Abel his brother; and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.” Many Hebrew texts and editions leave a space in the middle of the verse, and most of the ancient versions (Samar., LXX, *Tg. Neof.I*, Syr., Vul.) include the words, “And Cain said to Abel his brother, ‘Let’s go out to the field’ [נֵלְכָה הַשָּׂדֶה].” There is little doubt that these versions do not represent the original text but rather are later attempts to fill in a laconic text.

The question is whether the text as it stands is original (Jacob, 140) or textually suspect (Skinner, 107). Most likely a textual problem does lie behind the passage. The reading suggested by the versions (e.g., "Let's go out into the field") does not commend itself as original since it merely fills in the missing object clause without making any contribution to the sense of the narrative. Gunkel, 44, proposes the reading וַיְמָר (*wayyemer*) from מָרָה (*mārâ*, "to begin a struggle") or וַיֵּמַר (*wayyēmar*) from מָרַר (*mārar*, "to be bit-ter"). Others have suggested הִשְׁמִר אָחִי (*hišmir ʾāḥi*, "and he watched"), which would then be a wordplay on *wayyōʾmer*. "my brother's keeper") in v.9. There is, however, no explanation for such textual variation. The matter may best be left unresolved or, with Delitzsch, 183, concluded by observing that "the narrator, hastening past what Cain said, forthwith informs us of its being carried into execution."

The relationship of this passage to the rest of the Pentateuch, however, may point the way toward yet another textual solution. As the commentary to v.8 (above) has suggested, there are striking similarities between Cain's murder of Abel in 4:8 and the description of intentional homicide in Deuteronomy 19:11. There are also similarities between the role of the city as a refuge for Cain in ch. 4 and the description of the cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 19. If such innertextuality exists between these two passages, a close analogy with Genesis 4:8 ("and he said . . . and he rose up . . . and he killed him") and Deuteronomy 19:11 (lit., "he lies in wait . . . he rises up . . . and he strikes") gives a possible explanation for the origin of the reading, *wayyōʾmer*. Owing to the frequent interchange of *wayyōʾmer* within the narrative (each change of action is marked by *wayyōʾmer* [4:6, 7, 9a, 9b, 10, 13]), *ʾairab* (Dt 19:11) could have been read as *ʾaimar*.

2. Repentance (4:9 – 15a)

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"
"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the LORD,“My punishment is more than I can bear.
14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your
presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me
will kill me.”
15 But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer
vengeance seven times over.”

COMMENTARY

9 – 12 As in ch. 3, the Lord comes in judgment with a question in hand — “Where is your brother Abel?” (v.9). Cain’s evasion of the question is followed by divine punishment: “You are under the curse [*ʾārûr*] from the ground [cf. 3:17]. . . . When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you.You will be a restless wanderer on the earth” (vv.11 – 12). Cain’s punishment foreshadows the exile described in Deuteronomy: “You will be cursed [*ʾarûr*] in the city and cursed in the country [*baśśādeh*, lit., ‘in the field’]. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks” (Dt 28:16 – 18).

The biblical picture of Cain’s banishment in exile became a metaphor of divine judgment for the authors of the prophetic literature: “See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will disclose the blood shed upon her [*wᶜgillᵉtâ hāʾareṣ ʾet- dāmeyhā*]; she will conceal her slain no longer” (Isa 26:21; ch. 27 continues with images drawn from the early chapters of Genesis, of God’s final victory over the “serpent” [*nāḥāš*], and of God’s watchful care over his “fruitful vineyard,” where no “briers and thorns” are allowed to grow).

13 – 14 The meaning of these verses turns on how one understands (and translates) Cain’s reply in v.13. Was Cain’s response a complaint that his “punishment” was too great to bear? Or was it a confession that his “iniquity” was too great to forgive? The word “punishment” (*ᶜᵃwōnî*; GK 6411), as in most early versions, could have that sense (BDB, 731, 3.), but the common meaning throughout the OT is “iniquity” (BDB, 730 – 31, 1 – 2). The sense of *ᶜᵃwōnî* (“iniquity”) when used with *nśʾ* (“to bear”) suggests that, far from complaining

about his punishment, Cain was expressing remorse over the extent of his "iniquity" (ʿāwōnî; see Cassuto).

The Lord's response to Cain (v.15) bears out that interpretation. In v.14 Cain acknowledges that God's punishment (v.12) will result in his death ("anyone who finds me will slay me"), since being cast out means a loss of the protection of his community. Like Adam and Eve, who were also driven out (wayᵉgāreš, 3:24) of their homeland, Cain's penalty is banishment from a protective community: "Today you are driving [gērāštā] me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever [or 'whatever'] finds me will kill me."

15a The Lord's response is merciful, giving him unmerited protection: "Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him."This suggests a more positive understanding of Cain's confession in v.13. He appears as a repentant sinner. By themselves Cain's words may not have suggested repentance. The Lord's response, however, ("Very well; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over," NIV mg.) implies that Cain manifests a repentant heart. The point of the narrative is that God forgives a repentant sinner.

NOTE

13 The word עֲוֹנִי (ʿāwōnî; GK 6411) usually means "iniquity" or "guilt" but can occasionally mean "punishment." The early versions understood the word in the former sense (LXX, ἡ αἰτία [hē aitia]; notice also the variant ἡ ἁμαρτία [hē hamartia]; *Tg. Onq.*, חֹבִי [ḥōbî]; Vul., "*iniquitas mea*"), while most modern versions offer the latter sense (cf. the NIV). The reason for the modern translation consists in Cain's words in v.14.There he complains of his punishment, not of his guilt (Skinner, 109).

There are, however, compelling reasons for retaining the sense of "iniquity, guilt" as found in the older versions. First, for נָשָׂא עָוֹן (nāśāʾ ʿāwôn) to mean "bear one's punishment" is, at best, rare. (See BDB, 730 – 31, who list many examples that could be read as either "guilt" or "punishment." F. Buhl, in his seventeenth edition of William Gesenius's *Hebräisches und aramaisches Handwörterbuch*

[Berlin: Springer, 1962], 572, gives only two examples for <*aw*m *ôn* as "punishment" apart from Ge 4:13, namely, Isa 5:18; Ps 40:13; but neither passage has *nas*ìa ì, <*aw*m *ônn*; rather, they have only <*aw*m *ôn*. William Gesenius's *Thesaurus Philologicus Criticus Linguae Hebraeae et Chaldaeae Veteris Testamenti* [Lipsiae: Vogelii, 1835], 1000, lists only Isa 5:18 as "punishment [*poena peccati*]." In KB [689] only two of the six examples listed apart from Ge 4:13 have *nas*ìa ì, <*aw*m *ôn* [Eze 44:10, 12].)

Second, v.14 can also be read as simply a request for mitigation of punishment in addition to the confession of guilt in v.13. There is no reason why v.14 must be read as an explanation of v.13. Third, if <*aw*m *ôn* is to refer unequivocally to Cain's "punishment," which *he* must bear, we would expect that to be marked grammatically, e.g., מִנְּשֹׂאִי (*minnoś́î*; Jacob, 143).

3. Protection (4:15b – 24)

Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. [16]So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

[17]Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. [18]To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

[19]Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. [20]Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. [21]His brother's

3. Protection (4:15b - 24)

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[18]To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

[19]Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. [20]Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. [21]His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and fl ute. [22]Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

[23]Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me.
[24]If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times."

COMMENTARY

15b – 18 The major issues in this brief narrative are similar to those in the account of the "cities of refuge" (Nu 35:9 – 34). In both narratives God provides protection against one who "avenges the blood" of another.The initial question addressed in these narratives is not whether one is guilty of the crime of murder — that was to be settled by due process (Nu 35:12). The issue that links the narratives about Cain and about the cities of refuge (in Nu 35) is the need for protection of the accused against the threat of revenge. God's intention in both texts is to put an end to further bloodshed: "Bloodshed pollutes the land" (Nu 35:33).

The background of the cities of refuge may provide a much-needed clue to the meaning of the "sign" or "mark" (v.15b) given Cain. The purpose of the "mark" (or "sign") was to protect Cain from vengeance: "so that no one who found him would kill him." Though it is sometimes assumed that a "mark" was "put on" Cain (cf. the early verions), the passage states only that a sign was given "to" or "for" Cain (*wayyasìeam . .. leqayin ,ôt*, lit., "and he [the LORD] appointed to Cain a sign"; cf. 21:13, 18; 27:37; 45:7, 9; 46:3 with 21:14; 44:21).

What is the "sign"? The narrative does not explicitly say, though many attempts have been made to identify it, e.g., as a bright-colored coat or a horn on his forehead (L. Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christliche*

Kirche [Jena: Mauke's (Hermann Dufft), 1869], 497). An important clue may lie in the structure of the narrative itself. After the mention of the sign (v.15), the narrative continues with an account of Cain's departure to the land of Nod, "east of Eden," and his building of a city. The logic of the narrative suggests that Cain's city is related to the sign given him by God. The parallels with texts relating to the cities of refuge (noted above) suggest that Cain's "sign" may have been the safety he found in the building of a city. His city was a sign of his divine protection from anyone "who found him." Like the cities of refuge, Cain's city protected him from further bloodshed.

The subsequent narrative gives further evidence of the link between Cain's sign and the cities of refuge. Still in Lamech's day, Cain's city is portrayed as a place of refuge for the "manslayer" (see comments below). Hence, within the narrative's own logic, Cain's city may be viewed as a "city of refuge" provided him by God as protection from blood revenge (see Dt 19:11 – 13). The broader importance the author attaches to the "city" Cain builds can be seen in the rest of the chapter. There one finds a detailed description of the progress and development of that city. In most respects the narrative is told from a positive perspective on city life.

19 – 24 In vv.20 – 24 the author recounts the beginnings of city life. He does so by listing the basic skills of civilization and tracing them back to Cain's cities: animal husbandry (Jabal, v.20), arts (Jubal, v.21), craftsmanship (Tubal-Cain, v.22), and law (Lamech, vv.23 – 24).

Lamech's words are seldom identified as a sign of law and order. On the face of it they appear to constitute little more than an arrogant boast of his wanton lawlessness. What catches the eye in this narrative, however, are his words, "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me."These words are echoed in the laws formulated under the Mosaic covenant. As with those narratives dealing with the cities of refuge, an important link is made between these early narratives in Genesis and such Mosaic laws.

The meaning of the narratives is partly linked to an understanding of the later laws. As noted above, in the provisions for the cities of refuge, the Mosaic law provided a safe haven for *any* "manslayer" seeking a fair trial — that "the person accused of murder may not die before he stands trial before the assembly" (Nu

35:12). Lamech, by comparing his own avenging to the “avenging of Cain” (cf. v.24), announces that his city also offers a refuge and fair trial even for a guilty party such as himself. The point of the narrative is not to demonstrate Lamech’s sense of justice, much less to make it exemplary. Rather, its point is to show that the cities founded by Cain and his descendants provide even the ruthless Lamech with an ordered society under the rule of law.

Notes

17 Unlike the clause structure of v.1 (W + X + QATAL), the WAYYIQTOL clause here — וַיֵּדַע קָיִן (*wayyēdaʿ qayin*, lit., lit., “And Cain knew”) indicates that the narrative continues on through this portion of the story. The building of the city is to be understood as part of the same story and thus in close proximity to God’s words to Cain in v.15.

23 – 24 Lamech’s words not only show lexical similarities with the Mosaic law, they also show close form-critical similarities. The presence of the two כִּי (*kî*) clauses in Lamech’s song has long been a source of difficulty (e.g., “It is rather clumsy to begin the third line too with כִּי,” Westermann, 335). Form critically, the *kî* clause is the expected introduction to the main clause of the casuistic law (Gerhard Liedke, *Gestalt und Bezeichnung alttestamentlicher Rechtssätze* [Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1971], 29 – 35). The *kî* clause in v.24 also follows the pattern of casuistic law in its verbal form: (1) the initial *kî* (2) followed by the verb (3) in the third person (4) imperfect (ibid., 34 – 35).

Westermann, 335, has pointed out that v.24 stands off from the song of Lamech and serves to link his words to the preceding narrative, suggesting that “it could well be that this verse is a later addition which links the old song with the Cain and Abel narrative.” If v.24 does not represent the words of Lamech but those of the narrator (as an inserted comment along the lines of 2:24), then the form-critical considerations of v.24 reveal an intentional link not only with its immediate context but also with the whole of the rest of the Torah.

The *kî* clause in v.25b shows how easily and imperceptively the author can move from discourse (someone speaking in the narrative) to narrative (the recounting of events within the text). Note that the only clue that the words “God

has granted me another child" are those of Eve and not those of the narrator is the first person pronoun לִי (*lî*, "to me"). Thus the change in person between Lamech's first person discourse in v.23 ("I have killed a man") and the reference to Lamech in the third person in v.24 ("Lamech seventy-seven times") may also be a clue to the shift from discourse to narrative within vv.23 – 24.

4. Blessing (4:25 – 26)

> [25]Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." [26]Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.
>
> At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

COMMENTARY

25 – 26 The scene at the conclusion of the chapter returns to the opening section of the narrative; another son is born (v.25). In spite of the evident consequences of the fall (v.8), there are new signs of divine grace (v.15b). Cain's sons have prospered and have founded a new world, one in which both Cain's descendants and those of his brother Abel practice the true worship of God (cf. v.26b and 12:8b).

At the conclusion of the narrative the focus of the author turns from Cain's line to the family of Seth — the son born "in place of Abel." An important distinction is made between the birth of Abel (4:2) and the birth of Seth (4:25). That distinction lies in Eve's changed attitude toward the two sons. As her words suggest, her attitude has shifted from one of rivalry with God ("*I* have begotten/ created a man," 4:1) to one of gratitude for God's good gifts: "*God* has granted [*šāṯ*] me another child [*zera*ʿ, "seed"]."

By drawing our attention in this narrative to "another seed," the author betrays his continuing interest in the promised "seed" (*zera*<) of the woman (3:15).That interest is carried over into the genealogy of "the seed" in ch. 5 (Witte, 61 – 62). By continuing to trace the identity of the seed of the woman (through Adam in ch. 5 and then further to Abraham in chs. 10 and 11), the author discloses the

seriousness and concern he has about the identity of the promised one in 3:15. Throughout the whole of the book, the author's focus remains fixed on the identity of the "seed" who will crush the head of the snake.

A surprising pattern is established in ch. 4 that remains central to most of the larger themes of the book. The one through whom the promised seed will come is not the eldest son, the heir apparent. The promised seed can be only that one whom God has chosen. Abel, the younger of the two sons, received God's favor (4:4); Seth, an even younger son, replaces Abel as "another seed."

To underscore the central importance of the line of Seth, the author notes that the worship of the covenantal God has already begun in his day: "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (v.26). To "call on the name of the LORD" means to worship God.The worship of God established and institutionalized in the Mosaic covenant was not new. The worship called for in the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant was a return to the ancient worship of the God known by the sons of Adam and the sons of Seth. Men and women of old, like Adam, Seth, and Abraham, were worshipers of the God of the covenant.

D. The Story of Noah (5:1 – 10:32)

OVERVIEW

Genesis 5:1 signals a major break by its heading, "This is the written account [book] of Adam's genealogy" (cf. 2:4a).The narrative that begins here concludes with the notice of the death of Noah in 9:29. It is built around a highly structured genealogical list of Adam's descendants, which highlights ten "men of reknown," that is, men of wide repute. The names begin with Adam and conclude with Noah. The whole of the flood story is inserted into the final section of the list beginning at 6:9 and concluding with Noah's poem in 9:25 – 27. A new genealogical list of the sons of Noah begins in ch. 10 (10:1 – 11:26); that list concludes with the birth of Abraham (11:26).

Several narratives of varying lengths are interspersed throughout these lists of

names. The largest, of course, is an account of the great flood in the days of Noah (6:5 – 9:19). Smaller narratives include Enoch's translation (5:24), Lamech's naming of Noah (5:29), the sons of God episode (6:1 – 4), Noah's drunkenness (9:20 – 27), Nimrod the mighty hunter (10:8 – 10), the origin of the Philistines (10:14), the division of the land (10:25), and the fall of Babylon (11:1 – 9). The interweaving of these sometimes small pieces of narrative with the genealogical lists is one of the most characteristic features of many sections of the narratives in Genesis.

Often the genealogical lists appear to be mere interludes in the course of the events carried along by the narratives. But a close reading of these texts reveals they are part of the larger compositional strategy of Genesis (and the Pentateuch) and often add a specific theological focus to the narratives into which they have been inserted.

1. Prologue (5:1 – 3)

OVERVIEW

The first question that must be put to these texts is that of the relationship of chs. 5 and 6 to the small segment of narrative in 6:1 – 4. As suggested by our outline, 6:1 – 4 is an "epilogue" to the genealogical list of names in ch. 5. In spite of the chapter divisions (which are a late addition and not part of the original text), these verses should not be read as a prelude to the story of the great flood (chs. 6 – 9). They are better understood as a conclusion to the list of the sons of Adam (ch. 5), offering a kind of summary of the main points of ch. 5 before moving on to the story of the flood. Hence 6:1 – 4 is an important staging point and transition closing off the narrative of Adam and his sons (chs. 4 – 5) and preparing for the major shift in focus to be taken by the narratives that follow (chs. 6:5 – 9:29; see discussion below).

> [1]This is the written account of Adam's line.
>
> When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. [2]He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them "man."

[3]When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 The contribution of the prologue (vv.1 – 3) to the overall sense of the genealogical list in vv.4 – 32 is seen in the fact that it repeats several points enumerated in the previous narratives, specifically, Genesis 1. In so doing, this prologue refocuses the reader's attention to the central event of ch. 1, the creation of the man and the woman in the image of God (v.1). In addition, the prologue connects ch. 5 to the concluding verses of ch. 4 (vv.25 – 26) by continuing its pattern of "birth" and "naming"—(lit.) "and he named their name Adam [humanity]" (v.2b).The genealogy concludes on this same note in Lamech's naming of Noah (5:29). Just as the first parents named their sons (4:25 – 26), God named Adam (v.2). Adam, in turn, named his son Seth (v.3).

One can thus point in this prologue to a correspondence between the first parents and their naming of their sons, and God and God's naming of Adam. This is the first time Adam has been named. His naming was not included in the earlier account of humankind's creation in chs. 1 and 2.The account of God's naming of Adam has apparently been intentionally withheld until just this moment in the narrative to heighten the comparison between the first parents naming of their sons 4:25 – 26 and God's naming of Adam (in this prologue). The prologue thus casts God in the role of a father who names his son, Adam, just as the fathers in the narratives name their sons. In the poem at the end of the Pentateuch the author returns to a similar theme: "Is he not your Father, your Creator, who made you and formed you?" (Dt 32:6b).As is frequently the case in the Pentateuch, central narrative themes in Genesis are repeated and highlighted in the poetry. In this case the focus is on God as a father.

This role of God as a father is heightened by the parallels between the creation of Adam "in the image of God" and Adam's fathering of a son "in his own likeness, in his own image" (v.3). Such details show that the author has gone to great lengths to cast God's creation of Adam in terms recalling an ancient patriarch's establishment and overseeing of his growing family. Humanity is seen as a family of nations. The author's motive in drawing such parallels lies in the purpose he assigns to the list of patriarchs in ch. 5. Not only is Adam, the

first man, the father of Seth and Seth the father of Enosh, etc., but by casting God as a father to Adam, the prologue further suggests that God is the Father of them all. If we continue to trace the lines of genealogical lists throughout Genesis, a central point emerges: God is the Creator and Father of all humanity (ch. 10). The prologue in 5:1 – 3 shares many similar themes to the prologue of the Song of Moses (Dt 32:6b).

Given the purpose of the prologue to ch. 5 (vv. 1 – 2), it is not surprising that the author returns to the theme of the "sons of God" at the conclusion this genealogy (6:1 – 2). Luke 3:38 may also be a conscious reflection on this emphasis when it refers to Adam (or Jesus) as the "Son of God" (see John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 473).

The author's return to the theme of divine "blessing" in 5:2b is part of the overall plan to cast God's purposes for humankind in terms that recall a father's care for his children. Throughout the rest of Genesis, the fatherly blessing of God's children is a recurring theme (9:26 – 27; 27:27; 48:15; 49:1 – 28). In keeping with that theme the author shows at each turning point in the book that by means of such blessing God renews his promises to the next generation (1:28; 5:2; 9:1; 12:3; 24:11).Viewed as a whole, a picture emerges of a loving father ensuring the future well-being of his children through an inherited blessing. In this way the author lays a theological foundation for the rest of Scripture.

God's plan of blessing for all humanity, though often put in jeopardy by human folly (Ge 3), will nevertheless be restored through the promised "seed" of the woman (3:15), the "seed" of Abraham (12:3), and, as that "seed" is then identified, an individual king who is the focus of the poems about the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" in 49:8 – 12 (cf. Rev 5:5 – 13). The "seed" of Abraham is thus an individual king from the tribe of Judah.

Apparently following this same compositional lead within Genesis, the apostle Paul identified Jesus as the "seed" through whom God was to "bless" all humankind (Eph 1:3) and through whom God "adopted us as his sons" (v.5) so that "we have obtained an inheritance" (v.11, NASB) from the one we may call "*Abba*, Father" (Ro 8:15). In his picture of God as Father and the notion of an inherited blessing Paul shows that he has read these early narratives of Genesis

along similar lines as its author, that is, as focusing on an individual king from Judah. Paul's contribution was to identify this promised "seed" of Abraham as Jesus (Gal 3:16).

2. The Sons of Adam (5:4 – 32)

4 After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and
daughters. 5 Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died.
6 When Seth had lived 105 years, he became the father of Enosh. 7 And
after he became the father of Enosh, Seth lived 807 years and had other
sons and daughters. 8 Altogether, Seth lived 912 years, and then he died.
9 When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. 10 And
after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other
sons and daughters. 11 Altogether, Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died.
12 When Kenan had lived 70 years, he became the father of Mahalalel.
13 And after he became the father of Mahalalel, Kenan lived 840 years and
had other sons and daughters.
14 Altogether, Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died.
15 When Mahalalel had lived 65 years, he became the father of Jared.
16 And after he became the father of Jared, Mahalalel lived 830 years and
had other sons and daughters. 17 Altogether, Mahalalel lived 895 years, and
then he died.
18 When Jared had lived 162 years, he became the father of Enoch. 19 And
after he became the father of Enoch, Jared lived 800 years and had other
sons and daughters. 20 Altogether, Jared lived 962 years, and then he died.
21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah.
22 And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God
300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Altogether, Enoch lived 365
years. 24 Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took
him away.
25 When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of
Lamech. 26 And after he became the father of Lamech, Methuselah lived
782 years and had other sons and daughters. 27 Altogether, Methuselah lived
969 years, and then he died.

[28]When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. [29]He named him Noah and said, “He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.” [30]After Noah was born, Lamech lived 595 years and had other sons and daughters. [31]Altogether, Lamech lived 777 years, and then he died.

[32]After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham and Japheth.

COMMENTARY

4 – 32 The genealogical list in ch. 5 is nearly identical in form to that in 11:10 – 26, the genealogy (*tôlᵉdōt*; NIV, “the account of ”) of Shem. The only difference in the formal elements between the two genealogies is the inclusion of the clause, “and then he died” (*wayyaìmoìt)* at the end of each of the names in ch. 5. The author felt it important to remind the reader specifically of the death of each patriarch. In other genealogical lists in Genesis he allows the death of each individual to remain implicit in the enumeration of the total years of his life.

What purpose lies behind this unique fate of the genealogy? The answer lies in what is said about Enoch, the seventh patriarch in the genealogy, who *did not die*. The author simply says that Enoch “was no more, because God took him away” (v.24). The total of the years of his life is recorded, as with the other genealogies, but there is no mention of his death. His life came to an end, but not through death. The Lord “took” him.

The author’s purpose in singling Enoch out in this way is disclosed by the use of repetition. The fact of each patriarch’s death is stated once. But the author repeats twice the fact that Enoch “walked with God” (vv.22, 24). Repetition is an important means for driving home a point in a narrative. Enoch’s escape from death is tied directly to the fact that he “walked with God.” This phrase “walked with God” describes a life of faithfulness and obedience to God. Noah too “walked with God” and was “a righ teous man, blameless among the people of his time” (6:9). Abraham and Isaac, as faithful servants of God, also walked with God (24:40; 48:15).The repetition of the phrase in vv.22 and 24 suggests it is the author’s way of explaining why Enoch did not die.

By means of subtle selectivity the author's purpose begins to emerge. Enoch found *life* and escaped the curse, death. In this brief episode the author uncovers a fundamental truth: Death is not the last word. In the face of death one can, like Enoch, find life by "walking with God." In his focus on Enoch's fate (and faith), the author has found a door leading back to the tree of life (3:24). The door is faith and obedience, or, as later illustrated in the life of Abraham, to trust and obey. For Enoch the door opened because he "walked with God." Hence Enoch is an example for all who seek life. With Abraham the meaning is also clear: God says, "Walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you" (17:1 – 2).

For the author of Genesis, "walking with God" is the way to life. Similarly, Moses said to the people in the wilderness, "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands . . . and the LORD your God will bless you" (Dt 30:15 – 16). For the author of the Pentateuch, "walking with God" is not merely "keeping" a set of laws. Rather, it is just with those men who could not have had such "laws" that the author associates the theme of "walking with God." By choosing such men to exemplify "walking with God," the author looks beyond the role of law.

As important as the law is, we should not lose sight of the fact that from the author's perspective, the way of the law given at Sinai did not prove successful (e.g., Dt 31:27). Another way lay open in the future (30:5 – 6). That way was already exemplified in men such as Enoch, who "walked with God" (Ge 5:22); Noah, who "walked with God" (6:9); and Abraham, who "believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteous ness" (15:6). It is to those distant patriarchs who lived long before the giving of the Sinaitic law that Genesis turns for its model of faith and trust in God.

Another of the ten patriarchs to be singled out for special attention is Noah, the tenth in the list. The genealogical list in ch. 5 has been purposefully shaped at its conclusion to accommodate the flood narrative (see Notes). Hence the flood narrative has been intentionally inserted into the genealogy between the recording of Noah's age at the time he begat his three sons (*wayʿhî-nōaḥ,* 5:32; lit., "And Noah was") and the notation of the total length of his life (*wayehî-noìah*., 9:28) and his death (*wayyaìmoìt,* 9:29; "and then he died"). As a result the notation relating to the specifics of Noah's life and family varies considerably

from those of the rest of the patriarchs in ch. 5.

Two points in particular call for comment. First, in 5:29 — a section that breaks into the formal pattern of the list of names and shows lines of affinity with the structure and content of the prologue (5:1 – 3) — we read that Noah will bring comfort from the labor and painful toil of the curse (*wayyiqrā᾽ ᾽et-šᵉmô nōaḥ … zeh yᵉnaḥᵃmēnû*, "He named him Noah. . . . He will comfort us," v.29). The author does not explain what the comfort is, but given the overall direction of these narratives it is likely found in both the salvation provided via the ark and the sacrifice Noah offered after the flood (8:21).

Second, it is significant that the flood narrative (6:5 – 9:17), in which Noah and his family are the sole survivors, is inserted into the genealogical list just before the final word of Noah's death (9:29). Thus in the present shape of the narrative, the word about Noah's death (*wayyāmōt*) appears after the flood (in 9:28 – 29) and before the table of nations (ch. 10). The reason for this adjustment to the genealogy of Noah and the insertion of the account of the flood is clear from the way the author introduces the genealogy of Noah into the flood account (6:9 – 10). By inserting the heading of Noah's genealogy before the flood, the explanation for Enoch's deliverance from death ("he walked with God," 5:22) is made the basis for Noah's rescue from the flood: "he walked with God" (6:9). Thus in the story of Noah and the flood, the author repeats the lesson of Enoch: *Life* comes through "walking with God."

At the close of the account of the flood and by means of a brief genealogical note (v.18a), the author appends the intentionally brief story of Noah's drunkenness (9:18 – 27). It is a strikingly different picture of Noah from that of the flood story. However, it is a picture that well serves the author's purpose. In its present position this story provides a basis of the final, and inevitable, word concerning Noah: "and he died" (*wayyāmōt*,v.29). While the life of Noah, along with Enoch's, provides a lesson in the way to life ("he walked with God"), Noah's story also provides an opposite lesson. He, like all others before him except Enoch, eventually succumbed to the curse and died.

Though the details of this final story are unclear (see comments on 9:18 – 27), the author presents this final story as one of disgrace and shame for Noah. In its central lines the story resembles the account of Adam and Eve's fall (cf. the use

of “nakedness,” as in ch. 3). The author intentionally depicts Noah’s final act in such a way as to establish parallels between Noah’s disgrace (he took of the fruit of his orchard and became naked) and that of Adam and Eve (who took of the fruit of the garden and became aware of their nakedness). Then comes the last section of Noah’s genealogy along with a note, “and then he died” (vv.28 – 29).

NOTE

3 - 32 The formal elements listed below represent the structure of the list of names in ch. 5:

a. Name (X) lived (וַיְחִי, *wayʿḥî*) (nn) years/begat (וַיּוֹלֶד, *wayyōled*) Name (Y)
b. Name (X) lived (וַיְחִי, *wayʿḥî*) (nn) years/after he begat (אַחֲרֵי הוֹלִידוֹ, *ʾaḥʿrê hôlîdô*)
c. Name (X) begat sons and daughters (וַיּוֹלֶד בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת, *wayyôled bānîm ûbānôt*)
d. All the days of (וַיִּהְיוּ כָּל יְמֵי, *wayyihyû kol-yʿmê*) Name (X) are (nn) years
e. and he (Name [X]) died (וַיָּמֹת, *wayyāmōt*).

The occurrence of each of the above elements for each of the ten names is charted below:

Genesis 5 Names

	a	b	c	d	e
1. Adam	x (+)	x	x	x	x
2. Seth	x	x	x	x	x
3. Enosh	x	x	x	x	x
4. Kenan	x	x	x	x	x
5. Mahalalel	x	x	x	x	x
6. Jared	x	x	x	x	x
7. Enoch	x	+	x	x	–
8. Methuselah	x	x	x	x	x
9. Lamech	x(+)	x	x	x	x
10. Noah	(x)	-	6:1	-	-

10. Noah	(9:28)	x	-	x	x

The uniformity of the list suggests that the following deviations from the pattern deserve special attention.

1. At the beginning of the list (5:3b) there is an addition that mentions the naming of the next son: “and he named him Seth.” Symmetrically, at the close of the list (5:29), there is an identical addition mentioning the naming of the next son: “and he named him Noah.”

2. There is no mention of the deaths of Enoch and Noah in the list of ch. 5. It is important that for each of these two men the narrative specifically notes that “he walked with God.” Traces of a similar formal pattern can be detected: compare 5:22 — “and Enoch walked with God . . . and he begat sons [NIV, ‘and had other sons’]” — with 6:9 – 10 — “and Noah walked with God . . . and Noah begat three sons.”

3. Elements b through e are missing for Noah in ch. 5. Three of the elements are found at the close of the Noah narratives (b, d, e) and are in the same form as the rest of the names in ch. 5 (see 9:28 – 29). The only missing element in Noah’s case is the mention that he “begat sons and daughters” (c). As the table above has indicated, it is just that element that is taken up in the fi rst verse of ch. 6.

The relative chronologies and ages of the ten men. By adding the age of each patriarch at the time of the birth of the son who continues the line, a complete chronology from Adam to Noah can be established in which (according to the MT) “the Flood began in the year 1656 after the creation and ended in 1657” (Cassuto, 252). If taken as such it would seem that the time periods during which each of the patriarchs lived overlapped to a large extent. Adam, for example, would have lived until after the birth of Lamech, the ninth patriarch, and Methuselah, the eighth patriarch (the oldest and last to die), would have lived until the year of the flood. Though many diverse attempts have been made to explain the relative chronologies and long ages of the ten men in this list, there are essentially only three approaches to the problem.

1. One may read the ages and relative chronologies recorded throughout

this chapter as an idealization of a “long lost” age when life was not as it is today. Just as Isaiah envisioned the future rule of the Messiah as a time when “he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth” (Isa 65:20), so the writer of Genesis may also be idealizing the past with a symbolic exaggeration of the number of years of their lives.Though such an approach provides insight into the narrative purpose behind the listing of the long lives, it falls short of a complete explanation in that there is little or no indication in the text that the numbers are to be taken any way other than realistically.

2. Another approach is to insist on a straightforward reading of the list as an actual chronology of the pre-flood era. Though such long ages are considered improbable in today’s world, it may be argued that before the flood conditions were such that unusually long lives were not impossible. The strength of such an approach is that it appears to take seriously the actual statements of the text. On the face of it, the chapter suggests there were 1656 years from Adam to the flood and that these ten men lived lives that spanned much of that period.

The problem with reading the text this way is that it leaves us with an extremely short time span in which to place not only all the events and civilizations recorded in the early chapters of Genesis but also all those events known to us from the study of ancient history. If from Adam to the flood is only 1656 years and from the flood to Abraham 365 years (cf. Ge 11), then all of the known history of civilization and all the prehistory of the human race must be put within a time period of only two thousand years. In earlier commentaries (e.g., Calvin) such a chronology was taken at face value without diffi culty; but most today allow for some “gaps” in the chronology, thus not insisting on a time period of only 1656 years from Adam to the fl ood (cf. Henry Morris and John Whitcomb, *The Genesis Flood* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961]).

3. A further approach is to see the ten individuals listed as representative of extended families. The individuals themselves did not live to such old ages but rather the families and tribes they represent extended throughout those years. One could point to the account of “Judah” and “Simeon” in Judges 1 as a similar example. The tribes of Judah and Simeon are treated as individuals.Though the text speaks as though Judah and Simeon are individuals (lit., “And Judah said to Simeon his brother,” Jdg

1:3), they clearly represent the activities of whole tribal units.

3. Epilogue (6:1 – 4)

[1]When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, [2]the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. [3]Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years."

[4]The Nephilim were on the earth in those days — and also afterward — when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown.

1 – 2 At the conclusion of the genealogical list of ten patriarchs and before the account of the flood, the author summarizes the state of affairs in the lives of Adam's descendants. (For similar summaries at the close of a genealogical list, see 10:31 – 32; 11:27 – 32; Ex 1:7.) This brief passage has given rise to numerous and diverse interpretations. Most have arisen through associating these events with the story of the great flood as a prologue. If this passage is understood this way, it is not hard to see why it is read in a negative light, that is, in terms of the kind of wickedness that would give rise to the flood (e.g., Calvin:"For, in order to make a transition to the history of the deluge, [the author] prefaces it by declaring the whole world to have been so corrupt, that scarcely anything was left to God, out of the widely spread defection"). Once the account is understood as a motivation for the flood, all that remains is to settle on the exact nature of the wickedness here described. But if the events in these verses do not serve to introduce the flood, an entirely different assessment must be given to the events.

Three interpretations of vv.1 – 4 are commonly held. The "sons of God" are (1) angels (the oldest view, e.g., Codex Alexandrinus: *angeloi* ["angels"]); (2) royalty (also very old, e.g., *Tg. Onq.*: *benê rabr ʿbaya*ì, ["sons of lords"]; see also *Tg.Neof. I*: "sons of judges," though a marginal reading has "kings," or possibly "angels"); and (3) pious men from the "line of Seth."

The first view is often rejected as a contradiction to the statement in Matthew

22:30 that angels cannot marry: “At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.” A more commonly accepted view is that the phrase “sons of God” refers to the godly, pious line of Seth (Calvin: “It was, therefore, base ingratitude in the posterity of Seth, to mingle themselves with the children of Cain”; *The Sco-field Bible*: “verse 2 marks the breaking down of the separation between the godly line of Seth and the godless line of Cain”).

All such interpretations originate from the assumption that vv.1 – 4 introduce the flood and must be understood as the immediate cause of the flood. If, however, vv.1 – 4 serve as a conclusion and summary of ch. 5, there is little to arouse suspicion that the events recounted here are out of the ordinary. If vv.1 – 4 summarize ch.5, they may be only a reminder that the sons and daughters of Adam had greatly increased in number (suggested in ch. 5), had married (assumed in ch. 5), and had continued to have children (stated in ch. 5).The impression given by the events in vv.1 – 4 is that they are an interlude, a sort of calm before the storm. For a brief moment we see a glimpse of humankind in the midst of their everyday affairs: “marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away” (Mt 24:38 – 39).

As in 2:24, where the author turns briefly to the theme of marriage before moving on to the account of the fall, so here in 6:1 – 4, on the eve of the great flood, the narrative again returns to the theme of marriage. The depiction of marriage in this narrative hinges on several key terms, each of which has been previously noted by the author. The statement that “men began to increase in number [*lārōb*] on the earth” (v.1) recalls the blessing of God in 1:28: “Be fruitful and increase in number” (*ûrebû*; cf. Ex 1:7).

3 The statement in v.3 raises several questions: “My Spirit will not remain [*yaƒÊdo*n; NIV, ‘contend’] with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.” Though open to multiple interpretations, the sense of the statement must be derived from within the context of what both precedes and follows.

In v.3 God speaks for the first time since 5:2. After a brief description of his creating of humankind as male and female (5:1), we are told that God “named

them ‘man’ [Adam].”The term “man” here has a broader scope (“humankind”) than the single individual (“Adam”) in ch. 4. Throughout ch. 5 the focus of the author turns to the lives of ten individual men.

In 6:3 God speaks a second time. The sense of the term “man” (Adam) is again not individual men, but “humankind” as a whole: “for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.” Between these two divine discourses (5:3 and 6:3), the author has inserted the list of ten individuals whose length of life stands in stark contrast to the “one hundred and twenty years” of the life of “humankind.” The contrast between the excessively long years in the lives of these ten men and the more common “a hundred and twenty years” of the lives of humankind in general is intentional. The likely inference from the contrast between the length of lives in the narratives (6:3) and genealogies (5:3 – 32) is that what gave these ten men their long lives was God’s Spirit dwelling (yādôn) in them (cf 2:7). It was not their own achievement, for “they were only flesh.”

The sad reality of the narrative is not merely that such long lives no longer belong to the present, but also that they are part of a world long gone. The long lives of the ten great men in ch. 5 are exceptions rather than the rule. Humankind could hope to attain only “a hundred and twenty years.” Such a short (cf. 47:9) life is the result of human failure and separation from the Creator.

In keeping with this point the author continues to record the ages of the central characters of the book and notes that their ages grew increasingly small (cf. 11:10 – 26). It is only at the close of the Pentateuch that the author arrives at an individual, Moses, who lives for 120 years and at his death is still in good health (Dt 34:7). He, like those after the flood, could only reach the age of 120. The effect of Adam’s fall is making itself felt even in the life of Moses.

Luther understood the 120 years of v.3 to be a “reprieve” granted by God before the flood (“I want to give to them yet a reprieve of 120 years,” Luther Bible; also Calvin). That interpretation is partially an attempt to resolve the discrepancy between the limitation of humankind’s life to 120 years and the still excessive lengths of life in 11:10 – 26 (cf. Augustine: “They cannot be taken as foretelling that thereafter men would not live beyond a hundred and twenty years, since we find that after the flood, as before, men lived even beyond five hundred years,” *City of God* 15.24).

An allusion to a divine reprieve before the onset of the flood may be found in 1 Peter 3:20 — "when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built." This has been taken by some to refer to the period of 120 years mentioned in Genesis 6:3. That understanding of the 120 years is found in *Targum Onqelos* ("A reprieve [,*arka*ì,] will be given to them") and *Targum Neofiti I* ("Behold I have given you the space [,*arka*ì,] of a hundred and twenty years [hoping that] perhaps they might repent and they not do [it]"). The notion of a 120year reprieve is not found in other, earlier versions, such as the LXX.

4 The term "Nephilim" (*hannepilîm*) refers in the Pentateuch to the great men of old (*ʾanšê-middôt;* NIV, "people . . . of great size," Nu 13:32), such as those in the line of Adam. It also refers to the mighty men living in the land of Canaan at the time of the Exodus (Nu 13:32 – 33). In Genesis 6:4 the "Nephilim" are the great men of antiquity (*ʾanšê-haššēm*, lit., "men of name"). They are those in the line of Adam and his descendants in ch. 5 — "men of renown." The further mention of the "Nephilim" by the spies in Numbers 13:33 suggests either that some descendants of the "Nephilim" in ch. 5 survived till the time of the exodus or that it was a general term that could apply to various mighty men of old.

"and it was"; NIV, "When") — follows the string of similar clauses at the end of ch. 5 (vv.31 – 32). In 5:32 the *wayehî* clause is continued by (*wayyôled* וַיּוֹלֶד , "and he became the father of," 5:32b), just as *wayehî* in 6:1a is continued by (*yulʾdû* יֻלְּדוּ, "and they were born," 6:1b).The line of WAYYIQTOL clauses continues from ch. 5 to 6:3, whereas in 6:4a the narrative line is interrupted by an asyndetic, compound nominal clause with the perfect: (*hannᵉpilîm hāyû bāʾāreṣ,* הַנְּפִלִים הָיוּ בָאָרֶץ , "The Nephilim were on the earth"). Such clauses have marked the conclusions of sections of narratives since the first chapter.

2 The identity of בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (*bᵉnê hāʾᵉlōhîm,* "the sons of God") and בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם (*bᵉnôt hāʾādām,* 8220;the sons of God") and ìd;a;h; twOnB] (*benôt ha*ì,*aìdaìm,* "the daughters of men [lit., 'man']") has been the subject of a longstanding debate among biblical scholars (see comments above). If these verses are a summary conclusion to ch. 5, the description of the sons of God as choosing wives from the daughters of men does not point to a horrendous act.The only negative connotation may come from the contrast between God's exercise of "the knowledge of good and evil" in choosing a wife for Adam ("The LORD God said,'It is not good for the man to

be alone,’” 2:18) and the sons of God now taking on themselves the same exercise of that knowledge: וַיִּרְאוּ בְנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים … כִּי טֹבֹת (*wayyir᾽û bᵉnê-hāᵉlōhîm … kî ṭôbôt*, lit. “and the sons of God saw that they were good”).

Why, then, are the men specifically called the “sons of God” and the women the “daughters of men”?

This designation is in keeping with the earlier accounts of the origin of the man and woman. The description of the creation of the man and woman in ch. 1 makes it clear that both have been created in God’s image. In chs. 2 and 3 the man is created by the breath of God (2:7) and the woman is created from the man’s “side.” Thus men are called the “sons” (*benê*) of God — denoting their origin from God — and women are called the “daughters” (*benôt*) of man — denoting their origin from man’s side. In the use of the word “daughters” (*benôt*), there is a possible wordplay on the woman’s origin in 2:22.

3 The translation,“My Spirit will not contend with man forever,” rests on reading ˆwOdy: (*yaƒÊdo*n, “to prevail”) as a form of ˆyDi (*dîn*, “to rule”), which is unlikely (see BDB, 192) since the word would then have to be *yaƒÊdi*n, not *yaƒÊdo*n, or *yaƒÊdon* would have to be taken as a form of the otherwise unknown root ˆwOD (*dôn*; Bauer and Leander, *Historische Grammatik*, 398; cf. KB, 208). It is generally agreed that the LXX’s katameivnh (*katameine*ì, “stay, abide”) is an attempt to gain a sense from the context alone and thus does not reflect an early understanding of the word itself. However, in light of the complete lack of a consensus on the philological basis of the term, it may be best to follow the lead of the LXX and seek a sense for the word from within the immediate context. The LXX’s “shall not abide with” (ouj mh© katameivnh, *ou me*ì *katameine*ì) adequately reflects the sense of contrast with the second part of the verse: “his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”

4 The author assumes that his readers do not understand the term הַנְּפִלִים (*hannᵉpilîm*,‘ “the Nephilim”; GK 5872), since he identifies them within the narrative as the הַגִּבֹּרִים (*haggibbōrîm*,' “the heroes”) and the אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם (*ʔanšê haššēm*, “men of renown”). The antecedent of הֵמָּה (*hēmmâ*, “they”) is *hannᵉpilîm* (Skinner, 147). The *hannepilîm* were in the land “in those days” and “also afterward,” “when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them.” The sense of the phrase *wᵉgam ʔaḥᵉrê-kēn ᵓšer* (“and also afterward when”) appears to be that the

hannepilîm were not the offspring of the union of the sons of God with the daughters of man, since the *hannepilîm* were in the land "while" and "also after" the time of the union of the sons of God and the daughters of men.

The remark in Numbers 13:33, which identifies the *hannᶜpilîm* seen by the spies in the land with the "sons of Anak" and the *hannᶜpilîm* in Genesis 6:3, is not in the LXX and thus may not have been in the original Hebrew text. On the face of it, the remark presents a problem for the view that only Noah and his sons survived the flood, since it suggests that the "sons of Anak" were descendants of the "Nephilim" (*min-hannepilîm*, lit., "from the Nephilim") who lived before the flood. In Numbers 13:22, 28, the "Anakim" are called יְלִדֵי הָעֲנָק (*yᶜlidê hāᶜnāq*, "descendants of Anak") rather than בְּנֵי עֲנָק (*bᶜnê ᶜnāq*, "sons of Anak") as in Numbers 13:33 (NIV, "descendants"). However, in Deuteronomy 9:2 they are called the *benê <anaìq* (NIV, "Anakites"). If the remark in Numbers 13:33 is secondary, it may have been motivated by the sense of "and also afterward" (*wegaìm ,ah.arê-keìn*) here in Genesis 6:4.

4. The Flood (6:5 – 9:17)

OVERVIEW

The biblical account of the flood is a carefully wrought and complex narrative. It is a masterpiece of dramatic action and perspective. A unique feature is its perspective on divine judgment. From the beginning and throughout most of the story, the reader views the events solely from the perspective of the main characters. This means that we see the story only as those inside the ark saw it. Or, to say it differently, we don't see what they also don't see. There is no neutral corner from which the reader may safely view the events (see below).

There are seven stages to the narrative: (1) the decision to send the flood and rescue Noah (6:5 – 12), (2) the command to build the ark (6:13 – 22), (3) the command to enter the ark (7:1 – 5), (4) the coming of the floods (7:6 – 24), (5) the abatement of the floods (8:1 – 14), (6) the command to exit the ark (8:15 – 19), and (7) the building of the altar and the making of the covenant (8:20 –

9:17).

The author moves the reader through these narrative stages, all the time keeping a tight reign on the point of view from which the story is told. At the beginning, only briefly are we allowed to follow the course of events from a divine perspective. Through the eyes of the narrator we are given a brief glance from heaven. We see earth and we listen in on God's thoughts and conversations with Noah. We are allowed only a single glance at the divine judgment that ultimately moves God to action (6:5 – 7:5). The end of the story is never in doubt. We stand alongside the narrator, who ponders the depths of man's sin.We hear God's gracious appraisal of Noah and learn of his righteous ness (6:8 – 9). Amid all the signs of divine judgment, we see that this is a story of grace.

As the rains begin to fall, the events outside the ark fade from the line of narration and eventually from memory. We are left alone with those inside the ark. The narrator clearly wants us to look beyond the evidences of divine judgment that plays itself out just outside the ark to see this primarily as a story of divine grace. Only those inside the ark are rescued. Those inside the ark with Noah find safety because of God's gracious desire to save.

a. The decree (6:5 – 12)

5 The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become,
and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.
6 The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.
7 So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth — men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air — for I am grieved that I have made them."
8 But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

9 This is the account of Noah.

Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God.
10 Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth.

11 Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.
12 God saw how corrupt the earth had become, for all the people on earth had corrupted their ways.

COMMENTARY

5 – 7 These verses serve as the introduction to the flood story. They link the story with previous narratives and provide the central themes of the narration that follows. Throughout this story there are numerous ties to the creation account in Genesis 1. The intent is apparently to depict the great flood as a reversal of God's work of creation. In ch. 1 God prepared the *good land* for the man and his family. In the account of the flood, God takes back the good land because humankind acted corruptly and did not walk in God's way. The central themes introduced in these opening verses are divine judgment and God's gracious salvation.

The cause of the flood is tied directly to the account of the fall in ch. 3. In the fall humankind acquired the "knowledge of good and evil" (*t.ôb waìraì*<, 3:22). It is clear from this narrative that for the author possession of the knowledge of "good and evil" is not necessarily beneficial. Humankind was better off trusting God for the knowledge of what was "good" (*t.ôb*) than having to decide that on his own.

One of the ways the author teaches this lesson in ch. 1 is through the recurring expression "and God saw [*wayyar*] that it was good" (*t.ôb*). The central theme of "God's good provisions" is thus woven into the fabric of the narrative. After the fall (ch. 3), when humankind are left to themselves to find the "good," we meet with the same expression but in a slightly modified version. The narrative no longer says, "God saw [*wayyar*,, v.5] the good." What God now sees ("the LORD saw [*wayyar*,]," 6:5) is how great a calamity (*raì*<*at*) human beings have gotten themselves into: "every inclination of the thoughts of his heart is only evil [*ra* <]."

In v.6 the author describes the Lord's reponse to the wickedness of humankind: "the LORD was grieved [*wayyinnaìh.em*] that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain [*wayyit*<*as. s.eìb*]." As is so often the case, the author makes his point by means of a wordplay, here, on Lamech's naming of Noah: "He will comfort us [*yenah.amef Ênu*] in . . . the painful toil of our hands [*umef*Ê<*is.s.ebôn*]" (5:29). As the central character in the narrative is introduced with plays on words reflected in his name, "Noah" (*noìah.*) will bring "comfort" (*nih.am*). He will give comfort from the grief and pain (<*aìs. ab*) of

human rebellion.

By making God the subject of the verbs in v.6 (“the LORD was grieved . . . and his heart was pain-ful”), the author shows that the grief and pain of human sin was not felt only by humankind. God himself was grieved by the sin of humankind (v.7). In returning to the role of “comforter” invested in the sense of Noah’s name (5:29), the author suggests that Noah brings comfort both to humankind and to God.

8 In God’s grief there is abundant grace. Noah, alone among all the sons of Adam, “found favor [*h.eìn*, i.e., ‘grace’; GK 2834] in the eyes of the LORD.” Once again the narrative drives its point home with a play on Noah’s name. The consonants of the word “grace” (*h.n*) are a reversal of the consonants of the name “Noah” (*nh.*). The purpose of v.8 is to show that Noah found favor (grace) with God. What God saw in Noah is recounted in the following section (vv.9 – 12). In those verses the author demonstrates the character of Noah, which lay behind God’s response of grace. In that explanation lies the central purpose of the flood account. Noah represents the obedience of faith. He alone is saved from the divine judgment of the flood.

9 – 12 The account of the flood begins in v.9 with a description of Noah’s righ teousness. The purpose of the story is not to show why God sent the flood but to show why God saved Noah. The ark, not the flood, is the focus of the author’s attention. In the opening section Noah’s “righ teousness” is contrasted with the “violence” of “all flesh.” The point of the narrative could not be more transparent. God saves Noah because he “walked with God” and did not “corrupt” God’s way (v.12). The author intentionally draws a parallel between the deliverance of Noah from the flood and the deliverance of Enoch from death (5:22 – 24). God delivers those who “walk with him” and who do not “corrupt his way.”

In the account of Enoch’s deliverance, as here in vv.9 – 10, the author is not specific about the nature of Enoch’s “walking with God.” In the following section, however, the author peers much deeper into the nature of Noah’s “righteous ness.” The picture of Noah (*nōaḥ*) that emerges from the flood story is a model of the kind of life that finds grace (*ḥēn*) in God’s sight. Noah is a picture of simple obedience to God’s commands and trust in his provisions. In light of the

predominance of the concept of “faith” elsewhere in the Pentateuch (cf. Hans-Christoph Schmidt, “Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie, Beobachtungen zur Bedeutung der ‘Glaubens’ —Thematik innerhalb der Theologie des Pentateuch,” *VT* 32, 2 [1983]: 170 – 89), it appears the author has in mind a picture of Noah much like that of the writer of Hebrews. He was one who “by his faith . . . condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (Heb 11:7).

Note

5 The expression וַיַּרְא יְהוָה כִּי רַבָּה רָעַת הָאָדָם (*wayyarʾ yhwh kî rabbâ rāʿat hāʾādām*, “The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become”) is an allusion to the creation account in ch. 1: וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי טוֹב (*wayyarʾ ʾĕlōhîm ʾet-hāʾôr kî-ṭôb*, “And God saw that the light was good,” v.4), just as 6:12—וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה נִשְׁחָתָה (*wayyarʾ ʾĕlōhîm ʾet-hāʾāreṣ wᵉhinnēh nišḥātâ*, “God saw how corrupt the earth had become”)—appears to allude to 1:31— וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהִנֵּה־טוֹב מְאֹד (*wayyarʾ ʾĕlōhîm ʾet -kol-ʾăšer ʿāśâ wᵉhinnēh ṭôb mᵉʾōd*, “And God saw all that he had made, and it was very good”). Such allusions show that the whole of the narrative has been carefully shaped according to a master plan. (See O. Eissfeldt, “Die kleinste literarische Einheit in den Erzählungsbüchern des Alten Testaments,” *Kleine Schriften*, [Tübingen: Mohr, 1962], 1:144.)

b. The command to build the ark (6:13 – 22)

13 So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the
earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy
both them and the earth. 14 So make yourself an ark of cypress wood; make
rooms in it and coat it with pitch inside and out. 15 This is how you are to
build it: The ark is to be 450 feet long, 75 feet wide and 45 feet high.
16 Make a roof for it and finish the ark to within 18 inches of the top. Put a
door in the side of the ark and make lower, middle and upper decks. 17 I am
going to bring fl oodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the
heavens, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth
will perish. 18 But I will establish my covenant with you, and you will enter
the ark — you and your sons and your wife and your sons’ wives with you.
19 You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female,
to keep them alive with you. 20 Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of
animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come
to you to be kept alive. 21 You are to take every kind of food that is to be
eaten and store it away as food for you and for them.”

[22]Noah did everything just as God commanded him.

COMMENTARY

13 There are important similarities between the story of Noah's building of the ark, the creation account in Genesis 1, and the building of the "tabernacle" in Exodus 25ff. Each of these accounts follows a similar pattern of events: (1) God speaks (*wayyo*ì*,mer*/*wayedabbe*ì*r),* (2) God commands an action (imperative/jussive), and (3) the action is carried out (*wayya,as*)a (4) according to God's command (*wayehî ke*ì*n*/*ka,ašer s.iwwâ ,elo*ƒ*Êhi*m). These three narratives conclude with the making of a blessing (*wayeba*ì*rek,* Ge 1:28; 9:1; Ex 39:43), and two of them record the making of a divinely ordained *covenant* (Ge 6:8; Ex 34:27). Later biblical tradition and many modern exegetes associate the events of Genesis 1 – 3 with the making of a divine covenant (cf. Hos 6:7). Noah, like Moses, followed God's commands faithfully and found salvation and blessing in God's *covenant*.

The author's purpose in drawing out the detailed specifications for the ark in ch. 6, as with the details of the building of the tabernacle, is not so much to show how the ark or the tabernacle may have appeared, but so that we can appreciate the meticulous care with which these godly and faithful men went about their tasks of obeying God's will. By their actions they obeyed God with "all their hearts."

14 The size and shape of the ark are described only in general terms. The word "ark" (*tēbâ*) is an Egyptian loanword. Most artists' conceptions of "Noah's ark" are just that — artists' conceptions. The exact nature of the material from which the "ark" was constructed is unknown (see KB, 193). The NIV's "cypress wood" rests on the doubtful association of the consonants of the Latin word *cupressus* and those of the Hebrew *gpr*, as well as the fact that such wood was commonly used for shipbuilding in the ancient world. It may be that the term "gopher wood" (NASB) describes the shape of the wood (the LXX read it as *tetragon*m *os*, "square") rather than the kind of wood. In any event, "cypress/gopher wood" is used without further comment. As with several other terms in this narrative, its precise meaning is uncertain. The wooden structure was sealed with "pitch" (*ko*ì*per*).

The art of shipbuilding was a skill known and practiced by the earliest civilizations in the Near East. The city of Byblos, located along the Syrian coastline and one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the Near East, was well known in the region for its seafaring trade. The forests that grew nearby provided a continuous supply of timber, not only for ships but also for all kinds of construction projects.

According to the Palermo Stone (a copy of the annals of predynastic Egyptian kings; see James H. Breasted, *A History of Egypt* [London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1945], 47), the Egyptian king Sneferu brought forty shiploads of lumber from Byblos and built forty-four boats ranging up to 170 feet (one hundred cubits) in length (*ANET*, 227). The Egyptians called the inhabitants of Byblos "the woodcutters," and their name for large ocean-going ships was "Byblos-boats" (J. Bottero, "Syria Before 2200 BC," CAH, 1.2:347 – 8). Drower says of the shipyards of Byblos during the mid-second millennium BC: "This was an age of heavy freighters capable of transporting bulky cargoes. They carried timber, livestock and agricultural produce, salt, wine and oil in large jars. Ugarit, another large city on the Mediterranean Sea had grain-ships capable of carrying a hundred and fifty tons of grain" (M. S. Drower, "Syria c. 1550 – 1400 BC," CAH, 2.1:508).

15 For a wooden vessel, the size of the ark was enormous by ancient as well as modern standards. It would have been two and a half times the size of the large "Byblos-boats" used by the Egyptians during the Early Dynastic Period and would have been larger than the largest wooden ships in the modern period of sailing. The Cutty Sark, a three-masted clipper ship launched in 1869, was just over 212 feet. Oceanliners of the twentieth century, being constructed of steel, are capable of reaching a much larger size. The Queen Elizabeth measures over one thousand feet in length. By modern standards Noah's ocean vessel is comparable to a small cargo ship, thus still of considerable size.

16 According to this description of the ark, it was constructed with three decks, each with "rooms" (v.14) or separate compartments (*qin-nîm*, lit., "nests"); it had an opening for light (*s.oìhar*; NIV, "roof ") and a door in its side. We cannot assume that the structure consisted only of those features enumerated within this brief description. Only the faintest outline of its structure and shape is given.

We should not conclude from the brevity of the narrative that Noah and his sons built the “ark” solely by their own labor, any more than we would assume that Bezalel and Oholiab built the tabernacle without any help (Ex 31:2 – 6). Exodus 36:6 suggests there were others who worked with them, even though only Bezalel is mentioned (Ex 37:1; 38:22). There is ample evidence from the earliest periods of ancient Near Eastern civilization of the availability of requisite skills in architectural design and woodworking for such a structure. Early architectural achievements, built on a colossal scale (e.g., the funerary monuments of archaic Egypt), were built as replicas of earlier wooden structures. Though these earlier wooden structures have not survived, we can learn a great deal about their design and craftsmanship from the later stone and brick replicas (Walter B. Emery, *Archaic Egypt* [Mid-dlesex: Penguin, 1972], 176ff.).

c.The command to enter the ark (7:1 – 5)

[1]The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole
family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. [2]Take with
you seven of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and two of
every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, [3]and also seven of every
kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout
the earth. [4]Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days
and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living
creature I have made.”
[5]And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him.

COMMENTARY

1 – 5 The command to make an ark has been given and followed to its completion (6:22).The following narrative opens with the command to enter the ark before the coming rains (v.1).The emphasis of this section lies in the mention of special provisions for the “clean animals” and the procedures for taking them into the ark (v.2). The narrative follows the same pattern as the previous narrative, in which important parallels with the provisions for the building of the tabernacle were evident.

There are additional parallels linking the narrative of Noah's entering the ark and the provisions for making ready the tabernacle in the wilderness. Both narratives emphasize that entry into the ark/tabernacle must be accompanied by an animal offering. At the close of the description of the tabernacle (Ex 35 – 39), when the completion of the tabernacle was recorded (39:43), the command is given for it to be readied for use (40:1 – 33). When the Lord's glory fills the tabernacle (40:34 – 38), provisions are made for "drawing near" (Leviticus). One may "draw near" only by bringing an animal offering that is "unblemished" (*taìmim*, Lev 1:3; NIV, "without defect"). The completed tabernacle may be entered only with an offering of "unblemished animals." In a similar fashion, Noah's entry into the newly completed ark is accompanied by "seven pairs" of every clean animal.

The specific mention of the "clean animals" (*habbᵉhēmâ haṭṭᵉhôrâ*, v.2) that Noah took with him into the ark suggests that while in the ark he ate only "clean" food, as is also the requirement for the tabernacle (Lev 7:19 – 21). Such parallels suggest that the author is intentionally drawing a comparison between the salvation that lies in the ark of Noah during the impending "forty days and forty nights" of rain (v.4) and the salvation to be found in the presence of the tabernacle during the impending "forty years" in the wilderness. The centrality of the idea of a covenant lies behind the author's work.

At the close of the flood account, the author makes a direct reference to the sacrificial importance of these "clean animals." They were taken into the ark to be used as offerings (8:20 – 21). The Lord's acceptance of these offerings (*wayyāraḥ yhwh ʾet -rêaḥ hannîḥōaḥ*," "the pleasing aroma," 8:21) is cast in the terminology of Leviticus 1:17 (*rêaḥ nîḥōaḥ layhwh*,' "an aroma pleasing to the LORD"). As we might expect, these same events at the end of the flood are tied specifically to the notion of a covenant (9:8, 11). The author of the Pentateuch uses the ark in the flood narrative to foreshadow the salvation that comes through the tabernacle and the covenant. Such a reading of this material reflects a similar understanding of this passage in 1 Peter 3:21. The ark prefigures the saving work of Christ as pictured in NT baptism.

NOTE

1. Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 20, 24, 26; 6:13; 7:1 — וַיֹּאמֶר (*wayyoì,mer*, “and he said”)

2. Exodus 25:1a — וַיְדַבֵּר (*wayᵉdabbēr*,“and he said”)

3. Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24; 6:14 ff.; 7:1; Exodus 25:2 ff. — Imperative/Jussive 4. Genesis 1:7, 16, 25; 6:22; 7:5; Exodus 36:8 ff. — וַיַּעַשׂ (*wayyaʿaś*, “and he made”)

5. Genesis 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24; 6:22 — כֵּן (*kēn*,“so”)

6. Genesis 7:9, 16; Exodus 38:22; 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31, 32, 42, 43 — כַּאֲשֶׁר (*kaᵃšer*,“just as”)

1 Gunkel lists several repetitions throughout the flood account that in his judgment point to multiple sources lying behind the present account of the flood.

(1) God sees humankind’s wickedness:

(a) 6:5 וַיַּרְא יְהוָה (*wayyarʾ yhwh*,“and the LORD saw”)

(b) 6:12 וַיַּרְא אֱלֹהִים (*wayyarʾ ᵉlōhîm*,“and God saw”)

(2) God announces the flood:

(a) 6:17 וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵבִיא אֶת־הַמַּבּוּל (*waᵃnî hinnî mēbîʾ ʾet-hammabbûl*, “I am going to bring flood[waters]”)

(b) 7:4 אָנֹכִי מַמְטִיר עַל־הָאָרֶץ. (*ʾānōkî mamṭîr ʿal-hāʾāreṣ*,‘ “I will send rain on the earth”)

(3) The command to enter the ark:

(a) 6:18 וּבָאתָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה (*ûbāʾtā ʾel-hattēbâ*, “and you will enter the ark”)

(b) 7:1 בֹּא־אַתָּה וְכָל־בֵּיתְךָ אֶל־הַתֵּבָה (*bōʾ-ʾāttâ wᵉkol-bêtᵉkā ʾel-hattēbâ*, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family”)

(4) Number of animals:

(a) 6:19 וּמִכָּל־הַחַי מִכָּל־בָּשָׂר שְׁנַיִם מִכֹּל (*ûmikkol-hāḥay mikkol-bāśār šᵉnayim mikkōl*, “of all living creatures”)

(b) 7:2 מִכֹּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה תִּקַּח־לְךָ שִׁבְעָה שִׁבְעָה (*mikkōl habbᵉhēmâ haṭṭᵉhôrâ tiqqaḥ-lᵉkā šibʿâ šibʿâ*, “Take with you seven of every kind of clean animal”)

(5) Entrance into the ark:

(a) 7:7 hb;Teh/Ala, wOTai wyn:b;Ayven“W wOTv]aiw“ wyn:b;W j/nO aúbY:w? (*wayyaìboì, noìah. ubaƒÊnaƒÊyw we,ištô ûnešê-baìnaìyw ,ittô ,el-hatteƒÊb*a, “And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark”)

(b) 7:13 בָּא נֹחַ ... אֶל־הַתֵּבָה (*bāʾ nōaḥ…ʾel-hattēbâ*, “Noah . . . entered the ark”)

(6) Onset of the flood:

(a) 7:10 וַיְהִי לִשְׁבְעַת הַיָּמִים וּמֵי הַמַּבּוּל הָיוּ (*wayʿhî lᵉšibʿat hayyāmîm ûmê hammabbûl hāyû*, “And after the seven days, the fl oodwaters came”)

(b) 7:11 בִּשְׁנַת שֵׁשׁ מֵאוֹת ... נִבְקְעוּ כָּל־מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם (*bišnat šēš-mēʾôt … nibqᵉʿû kol-maʿyᵉnōt tᵉhôm*, “In the six hundredth year . . . all the springs of the great deep burst forth”)

(7) Flood waters prevailed:

(a) 7:17 וַיְהִי הַמַּבּוּל אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם ... וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֶת־הַתֵּבָה (*wayʿhî hammabbûl ʾarbāʿîm yôm … wayyiśʾû ʾet-*“For forty days the flood kept coming . . . they lifted the ark”)

(b) 7:18 וַיִּגְבְּרוּ הַמַּיִם...וַתֵּלֶךְ הַתֵּבָה (*wayyigbᵉrû hammayim … wattēlek hattēbâ,* "The waters rose . . . and the ark floated")

(8) All life died:

(a) 7:21 וַיִּגְוַע כָּל־בָּשָׂר (*wayyiguaʿ kol-bāśār,* "every living thing . . . perished")

(b) 7:22 כֹּל אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁמַת־רוּחַ חַיִּים בְּאַפָּיו ... מֵתוּ (*kōl ʾᵃšer nišmat-ruaḥ ḥayyîm bᵓappāyw … mētû,* "Ev- "Everything . . . that had the breath of life in its nostrils died")

(9) Flood waters ceased:

(a) 8:2a וַיִּסָּכְרוּ מַעְיְנֹת תְּהוֹם (*wayyissākᵉrû maʿyᵉnôt tᵉhôm,* "Now the springs of the deep . . . had been closed")

(b) 8:2b וַיִּכָּלֵא הַגֶּשֶׁם מִן־הַשָּׁמָיִם (*wayyikkālēʾ haggešem min-haššāmāyim,* "and the rain had stopped falling from the sky")

(10) Noah's knowledge that the flood had ceased:

(a) 8:11 וַיֵּדַע נֹחַ כִּי־קַלּוּ הַמַּיִם (*wayyēdaʿ nōaḥ kî-qallû hammayim,* "Then Noah knew that the water had receded")

(b) 8:15 וַיְדַבֵּר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־נֹחַ ... צֵא מִן־הַתֵּבָה (*wayᵉdabbēr ʾᵉlōhîm ʾel-nōaḥ… ṣēʾ min-hattēbâ,* "Then God said to Noah, 'Come out of the ark' ")

(11) God's promise not to destroy humankind again:

(a) 8:21 לֹא־אֹסִף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת־כָּל־חָי (*lōʾ-ʾōsip ʿôd lᵉhakkôt ʾet-kol-ḥay,* "never again will I destroy all living creatures")

(b) 9:11 וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה עוֹד מַבּוּל לְשַׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ (*wᵉlōʾ-yihyeh ʿôd mabbûl lᵉšaḥēt hāʾāreṣ,* "never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth")

When examined along with the variations in the use of *yhwh* and *ʼelofÊhim* and other points of style, Gunkel, 137, and others distinguished two primary sources behind the account: a "P" account of the flood (6:9 – 22; 7:6, 11, 13 – 16a, 17a, 18 – 21, 24; 8:1, 2a, 3b, 4 – 5, 13a, 14 – 19; 9:1 – 17, 28 – 29) and a "J" account (6:5 – 8; 7:1 – 2, 3b, 4 – 5, 7, 10, 12, 16b, 17b, 22, 23a – 23b; 8:2b, 3a, 6a – 6b, 7 – 12, 13b, 20 – 22). This discovery he called the "masterpiece" ("*Meisterstück*," 137) of modern biblical criticism. According to Skinner (147), the critical unraveling of the flood account "is justly reckoned amongst the most brilliant achievements of purely literary criticism, and affords a particularly instructive lesson in the art of documentary analysis." Westermann and other modern critical scholars continue to accept the analysis of the flood account represented in the work of Gunkel and Skinner ("We can accept therefore the present results of source criticism," Westermann, 396).

Note

13 – 22 Here are the formal similarities between various passages of Genesis and Exodus:

More recently, however, there has been a tendency to see in these repetitions a mark of the style and technique of the biblical writers. Rather than being a clue to the existence of a variant source, repetition can be viewed as an *essential element* in the structure of a narrative. R. N. Whybray ("The Making of the Pentateuch," JSOTSup 53 [1987]: 83), for example, has shown that not only is virtually every element in the flood account repeated, as the documentary analysis has shown, but also in most cases the repetition extends to three and four times:

God's intention to destroy the inhabitants of the earth is stated four times (Ge 6:5 – 7, 11 – 13, 17; 7:4). Four times it is recorded that Noah and his companions entered the ark (7:7 – 9, 13 – 14, 15, 16). Three times the coming of the rain is recorded (7:6, 10, 11 – 12).The prevailing or increasing of the waters of the flood is mentioned five times (7:17, 18, 19, 20, 24), and their abatement similarly five times (8:1, 2, 3, 4, 5). It is illogical on the basis of these repetitions to analyze the story into only *two* documents (J and P). On the other hand the dramatic effect of this repetition as it stands cannot be denied.

See also Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University, 1985), 365 – 440; G. J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *VT* 28 (1978): 336 – 48.

Andersen has shown that much of the repetition in the flood account stems from the writer's use of a type of sentence he has called "epic repetition" and "chiastic coordination."Thus, far from being a haphazard mixture of two divergent accounts of the flood, the end result of the narrative composition "looks as if it has been made out of whole cloth" (*Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 40).

d. The fl ood (7:6 – 24)

[6]Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. [7]And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons' wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the fl ood. [8]Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, [9]male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. [10]And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth.

[11]In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, on the seventeenth day of the second month — on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the fl oodgates of the heavens were opened. [12]And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights.

[13]On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. [14]They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. [15]Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. [16]The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in.

[17]For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. [18]The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the

water. 19They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. [20]The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. [21]Every living thing that moved on the earth perished — birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. [22]Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. [23]Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.

[24]The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days.

COMMENTARY

6 – 24 What is most apparent in the description of the onset of the flood is the focus of the author on the occupants of the ark. With great detail the procession of those entering the ark passes by the impatient eyes of the modern reader. Noah's age, the month and day of the beginning of the rain, the source of the waters, the kinds of animals and their number — no piece of information is unimportant if it contributes to the author's purpose of holding this scene before the eyes of the reader as long as literarily possible. The author wants his readers to take a good hard look at the ark and its importance in developing the character of Noah's trust in God.The author wants the reader to consider every detail.

Only at the conclusion of ch. 7, when the ark is safely afloat over the highest mountains in the surging flood, only then is the author ready to allow us a glance in the direction of those who did not seek refuge in the ark (vv.21 – 23). Even then the author's attention to those who did not survive the flood is motivated less by an interest in what happened to them ("[they] died," v.22) than by an interest in the reason why they perished: "Only Noah was left [*wayi..aƒÊ,er*], and those with him in the ark" (v.23). It is repeated four times in this narrative that they survived the flood because they did "as God had commanded" (*ka,ašer s.iwwâ ,elohÊhi*m, 7:9, 16; cf. v.5; 6:22). The author's point could not be clearer. Obedience to God's will is the way to salvation.

Noah's obedience foreshadows the faith of Abraham (*ka>ăšer ṣiwwâ …>lōhîm*, "as God commanded," 21:4) and Israel (*ka,ašer s.iwwâ yhwh*, "just what the LORD

commanded," Ex 12:28). In the Abrahamic narratives (Ge 12 – 25) Noah's obedience will be taken one step further as evidence of Abraham's faith (Ge 15:6). God was gracious to Noah (Ge 6:8) and counted him as righteous (Ge 6:9). Abraham believed God, who counted him righteous. The faith of both men was demonstrated in their obedience to God (Ge 7:5; 22:16).

e. The flood abates (8:1 – 14)

> [1]But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock
> that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the
> waters receded. [2]Now the springs of the deep and the fl oodgates of the
> heavens had been closed, and the rain had stopped falling from the sky.
> [3]The water receded steadily from the earth. At the end of the hundred and
> fifty days the water had gone down, [4]and on the seventeenth day of the
> seventh month the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. [5]The waters
> continued to recede until the tenth month, and on the first day of the tenth
> month the tops of the mountains became visible.

[6]After forty days Noah opened the window he had made in the ark [7]and sent out a raven, and it kept flying back and forth until the water had dried up from the earth. [8]Then he sent out a dove to see if the water had receded from the surface of the ground. [9]But the dove could find no place to set its feet because there was water over all the surface of the earth; so it returned to Noah in the ark. He reached out his hand and took the dove and brought it back to himself in the ark. [10]He waited seven more days and again sent out the dove from the ark. [11]When the dove returned to him in the evening, there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf! Then Noah knew that the water had receded from the earth. [12]He waited seven more days and sent the dove out again, but this time it did not return to him.

[13]By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry. [14]By the twenty-seventh day of the second month the earth was completely dry.

COMMENTARY

1 While those in the ark may have been safe, they had not yet been saved. The author does not finish the story of the flood until Noah and his family are safely on dry ground (v.14) and have offered a sacrifice. Those safe in the ark have to wait ("a hundred and fifty days," 7:24) for God to send deliverance. The same author passes over the four hundred years that Israel waited in Egypt (Ex 1:7; 2:24b) and then the forty years of waiting in the wilderness (Nu 14:33 – 34) in order to focus on the moment of God's deliverance. That moment comes after four hundred years, when "God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The story of Noah and the flood passes over the "hundred and fifty days" of waiting in the ark and proceeds immediately to the moment that "God remembered Noah and all . . . that were with him in the ark."

The description of God's rescue of Noah foreshadows God's deliverance in the Exodus. "God remembered [*wayyizkōr ʾĕlōhîm*] his covenant" (Ex 2:24) and sent "a strong east wind" (*bᵉrûaḥ qādîm zzâ*) to dry up the waters before his people so that they "went through . . . on dry ground [*bayyabbāšâ*]" (Ex 14:21 – 22); so also in the story of the flood, "God remembered" (*wayyizkōr ʾĕlōhîm*) those in the ark and sent a "wind" (*rûaḥ ᶜal-hāʾāreṣ*) over the waters so that his people might come out on "dry ground" (*yābᵉšâ hāʾāreṣ*, vv.1, 14).

Such verbal, thematic, and structural parallels are not coincidental. The author of Genesis, who frequently seizes on wordplays (e.g., 11:9) and turns of phrase within narratives (e.g., 21:6), most certainly saw the parallels suggested by these narratives and deliberately highlights their similarities. God's past redemptive works prefigure his redemptive work in the present and the future.

2 – 14 The author prolongs the picture of God's deliverance. God stops the rushing water and removes the sources of the flood (v.2), but it takes time before Noah is back on dry land (v.3). Noah, and the reader, must wait.With the picture of God at work as background, the author turns his attention again to those inside the ark. The narrative focuses on the patience of Noah as he waits for God's deliverance. At the end of forty days Noah begins to look for further signs that his deliverance has come to an end. He sends out a raven (v.7) and a dove (vv.8 – 12), but there are no signs of dry land. Patiently, Noah waits (vv.10, 12). When the sign of dry land finally appears and the dove does not return (v.12),

the author reminds us that Noah has waited exactly one year (cf. 7:6, 11 and 8:13 – 14). Even then Noah can only open the window and look outside the ark. He still must wait for God's command to leave it (vv.15 – 17).

The image that emerges from this narrative portrait of Noah is that of a righ teous and faithful *remnant* (*wayiššā'er 'ak-nōaḥ,* , 7:23; "Only Noah was left") patiently waiting for God's deliverance.This is a common image in later biblical literature (e.g., Isa 8:17 – 18; 40:31; Jas 5:7 – 11), and its development here in the flood narrative has contributed greatly to its further use. Henceforth within the biblical text, the flood is synonymous with divine judgment (e.g., Isa 8:7 – 8), and Noah's deliverance is an image of the salvation of the faithful (e.g., Mt 24:37 – 39).

NOTE

1 Wenham, 156, has shown how the structure of the flood story centers the reader's attention on the וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ (*wayyizkōr 'lōhîm 'et -nōaḥ,* "But God remembered Noah") of 8:1. Particularly important is the way the structural patterns noted by Wenham help to explain the author's careful attention to the time periods of each event. Wenham points to the following pattern of "mirror-image" repetition in the use of numbers:

7 days of waiting for flood (7:4)
7 days of waiting for flood (7:10)
40 days of flood (7:17a)
150 days of water triumphing (7:24)
150 days of water waning (8:3)
40 days of waiting (8:6)
7 days of waiting (8:10)
7 days of waiting (8:12)

One can clearly see the importance of the "7 days" in this pattern. It is the same seven-day pattern that plays a central role in the creation account of ch. 1. The period of forty days is also significant later in the Torah as the time of waiting and watching in the forty days of spying out the land and the corresponding forty years of waiting in the wilderness (Nu 14:33 – 35). In the

Numbers passage the forty years are specifically said to correspond to the forty days.

f.The command to exit the ark (8:15 – 19)

> [15]Then God said to Noah, [16]"Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives. [17]Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you — the birds, the animals, and all the creatures that move along the ground — so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number upon it."
>
> [18]So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. [19]All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds — everything that moves on the earth — came out of the ark, one kind after another.

COMMENTARY

15 – 19 With the same epic style as the account of the entry into the ark (cf. the sentence structure of 7:7 – 9 with 8:18 – 19, both being examples of "epic repetition," Andersen, 39; see Notes), the author depicts Noah's exit from the ark. Noah left the ark only at God's command (vv.15 – 16). The description, though condensed, follows the creation pattern in Genesis 1 (e.g., "let them swarm upon the earth, and let them be fruitful and multiply upon the earth," v.17, my trans.). The picture is that of a return to the work of creation "in the beginning." It is significant that at this point in the narrative the author takes up a lengthy account of the *covenant* (8:20 – 9:17). Hence the restoration of God's creation was founded on the establishment of a covenant.

There are several verbal and thematic parallels that link the picture of God's calling Noah out of the ark (8:15 – 20) to God's call of Abraham (12:1 – 7).

Genesis 8:15 – 20	Genesis 12:1 – 7
a. Then God said to Noah (8:15)	a. The LORD had said to Abram (12:1)
b. Come out from the ark (8:16)	b. Leave your country (12:1)

c. So Noah came out (8:18)	c. So Abram left (12:4)
d. Then Noah built an altar to the LORD (8:20)	d. So [Abram] built an altar there to the LORD (12:7)
e. Then God blessed Noah (9:1)	e. “And I [God] will bless you” 12:2)
f. “Be fruitful and increase” (9:1)	f. “I will make you into a great nation” (12:2)
g. “I now establish my covenant with you and with your seed” (9:9)	g. “To your seed, I will give this land” (12:7)

Both Noah and Abraham represent new beginnings in the course of human events in Genesis.

Both beginnings are marked by the divine promise of blessing and the establishment of a covenant.

NOTES

16 – 19 The sentence structure follows the pattern of Andersen’s “epic repetition” (39ff.). In Discourse:

1. 8:16: “Come out of the ark, you and your wife and your sons and their wives.”

2. 8:17: “Bring out every kind of living creature that is with you.”

In Narrative:

1. 8:18: So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives.

2. 8:19: All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds . . . came out of the ark.

Andersen, 40, says of this type of sentence, “The rhetorical effect of this kind of epic repetition is to slow down the pace of the narrative. It holds the picture a little longer and enforces it on the mind.”

17 Note the parallels between 8:17 and 1:20 – 22.

Genesis 8:17	Genesis 1:20 – 22
“. . . every kind of living creature that is with you – the birds, the animals, and all the that move along the ground —	“. . . every living and moving thing with which the water teems, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind” (1:21)
“so they can multiply on the earth”	“Let the water teem with living creatures” (1:20)
“and be fruitful and increase in number upon it.”	“Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water” (1:22)

g. The altar and the covenant (8:20 – 9:17)

20 Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean
animals and clean birds, he sacrifi ced burnt offerings on it. 21 The LORD
smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse
the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is
evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I
have done.
22 “As long as the earth endures,
seedtime and harvest,
cold and heat, summer and winter,
day and night will never cease.”
9:1 Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and
increase in number and fill the earth. 2 The fear and dread of you will fall
upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every
creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they
are given into your hands. 3 Everything that lives and moves will be food for
you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.
4 “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. 5 And for your
lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting

from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.

6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man,
by man shall his blood be shed;
for in the image of God
has God made man.

7 As for you, be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it.”

8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9 “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you 10 and with every living creature that was with you — the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you — every living creature on earth. 11 I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

12 And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: 13 I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. 16 Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

17 So God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have established between me and all life on the earth.”

COMMENTARY

8:20 – 9:17 In the account of Noah’s altar and the divine gift of a covenant, the author continues the close associations with Genesis 1. As a result of Noah’s altar and offering, humanity’s state before the flood is seemingly reestablished. Humankind is fallen (9:21); but through a sacrifice laid as an offering on the altar, they may find and enjoy God’s blessing (8:21 – 9:3). As in 1:26, the focus of the author after the flood is the creation of humankind in the image of God

(9:6).

Just as there are links between this passage and the creation account, so there are close connections between Noah's altar and Moses' altar at Mount Sinai (Ex 24:4 – 18). Noah's deliverance from the flood and Israel's deliverance from Egypt both bear similarities with God's work of creation. As is often true in the Bible, this work is linked to God's work of salvation. The following parallels give a sense of the verbal and thematic similarities:

1. The building of the altar follows a major act of God's salvation — God's rescue of Noah from the flood and God's deliverance from bondage in Egypt.

2. The altar and the offering mark the establishment of a "covenant" (*bᵉrît*; GK 1382) with God (Ge 9:9; Ex 24:7).

3. The outcome of both covenants is God's "blessing" (*wayᵉbārek*, Ge 9:1; *ûbēnak*, Ex 23:25).

4. The central provision is protection from the "beasts of the field" or "wild animals" " (*ḥayyat hāʾāreṣ*, Ge 9:2; *ḥayyat haśśādeh*, Ex 23:29) and and human enemies (Ge 9:5 – 6; Ex 23:22).

5. Specific mention is made that the "earth" will be preserved from further destruction (Ge 9:11; Ex 23:29).

6. In Genesis the visible "sign" of the covenant is a rainbow in the "clouds" (*beʿānān*, 9:13 – 17); in Exodus the covenant is marked by the appearance of the glory of God in the "cloud" (*heʿānān*, 24:15) that covered the mountain.

7. Both covenants state stipulations that must be obeyed (Ge 9:4; Ex 24:3).

These observations suggest that the author is intentionally drawing out similarities between God's covenant with Noah and the covenant at Sinai. Why? To show that God's covenant at Sinai did not signal a new act of God. The covenant at Sinai was a return to God's original promises in creation. At Sinai,

as in the past, God restored fellowship with humankind and called them back. The covenant with Noah plays an important role in the author's understanding of the restoration of divine blessing. It lies midway between God's original blessing of humankind at creation (1:28) and God's promise to bless "all peoples on the earth" through Abraham (12:1 – 3).What all of these covenants have in common is a focus on the universal scope of the divine blessing (1:28; 9:10; 12:1 – 3).

NOTES

8:20 – 9:17 It has already been noted that the creation account of Genesis 1 has been composed to foreshadow the giving of the covenant at Mount Sinai. One of the clearest indications of this is the pattern of the "ten words." Just as the whole of the covenant could be stated in "ten words" (עֲשֶׂרֶת הַדְּבָרִים, *ʿăśeret haddᵉbārîm*; NIV, NIV, "the Ten Commandments," Ex 34:28), so the whole of the universe could be created in "ten words" (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, *wayyōʾmer ʾᵉlōhîm*, "And God said"), a phrase that occurs ten times in ch. 1 — vv.3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29.The same pattern lies behind the account of the flood. Throughout the account there is the same tenfold repetition of "and God/the LORD said" — 6:7a, 13a; 7:1a; 8:15a, 15b [a second verb, "saying," untrans. in NIV), 21a; 9:1a, 8a, 12a, 17.

Such patterns are a part of the compositional strategy of the book. Within the structure of Genesis, the number ten is dominant — e.g., there are ten individuals in the lists of names in chs. 5 and 11, and there is a tenfold reiteration of the promised blessing throughout the book.

9:1 The similarities between 9:1 and 1:28 are transparent.

9:1 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נֹחַ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ (*wayᵉbārek ʾᵉlōhîm ʾet-nōaḥ uʾet-bānāyw wayyōʾmer lāhem pᵉrû ûrᵉbû ûmilʾû ʾet-hāʾāreṣ*, "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth' ")

1:28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ (*wayᵉbārek ʾōtām ʾᵉlōhîm wayyōʾmer lāhem ʾᵉlōhîm pᵉrû ûrᵉbû ûmilʾû ʾet-hāʾāreṣ*, "God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth' ")

6 The use of the third person in reference to God — בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים (*bṣelem ʾlōhîm*, "in the image of God") — as opposed to the first person, suggests that v.6b is to be understood as a comment of the narrator and not the words of God speaking to Noah. Thus at this point in the narrative the author has inserted an explanation (כִּי, *kî*, "for") for the prohibition of manslaughter — namely, a reference back to the creation of humankind in God's image. Already the narrative has become a platform for the development of the biblical law.

7 The blessing of v.1 ("Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth") is reiterated, though with a significant modification, in v.7 ("be fruitful and increase in number; multiply on the earth and increase upon it"): v.7 has *širṣû bāʾāreṣ* in place of v.1's *milʾû ʾet-hāʾāreṣ*.' Thus the text of v.1, which follows 1:28 (*mil,û ,et-haì,aìres*.), is made to conform to its future reference in Exodus 1:7 (*pārû wayyišrᶜṣû wayyirbû*,' "[they] were fruitful and multiplied greatly," which is summarized in the second half of the verse by *wattimmale*ì, *haì,aìres*. ,*oìtaìm*, "so that the land was filled with them").

5. Noah's Drunkenness (9:18 – 29)

18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and
Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These were the three sons of
Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth.
20 Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. 21 When he
drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.
22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two
brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across
their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's
nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see
their father's nakedness.
24 When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son
had done to him, 25 he said,
"Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers."
26 He also said,
"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem!

May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
[27]May God extend the territory of Japheth;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be his slave."
[28]After the flood Noah lived 350 years. [29]Altogether, Noah lived 950 years, and then he died.

COMMENTARY

18 – 19 These verses are both a conclusion to the flood story and at the same time a new short episode about Noah's drunkenness. They aptly demonstrate the author's style of composition throughout the rest of Genesis. By means of such transitional seams the author knits individual, self-contained stories into the larger story line of narrative.

20 – 21 In placing the story of Noah's drunkenness at this point in the story line, the author continues to cast the flood narrative as a renewal of creation. At the close of creation God blessed the first man and his family (1:28). In a similar fashion at the conclusion of the flood narrative, God blessed Noah and his family (9:1). At the end of the creation account God planted (*wayyiṭṭaʿ*, 2:8) a garden. Now, at the conclusion of the flood story, Noah plants (*wayyiṭṭaʿ*, v.20) a vineyard. The outcome of the two narratives is also similar. Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of their garden and the result was the exposure of their nakedness. Noah also ate of the fruit of his vineyard.and exposed his nakedness (v.21).

Genesis 2 – 3	Genesis 9:18 – 29
a. Then God planted a garden (2:8)	a. And Noah planted a vineyard (9:20)
b. And from the fruit she ate and . . . and he ate	b. And [Noah] drank from the wine
c. And their eyes were opened (3:7)	c. and he became drunk and Noah uncovered him-self in his tent (9:21)
d. And they saw that they were naked (3:7)	d. and Ham saw his nakedness (9:22)
e. (they made themselves clothing; 3:7)	e. They took clothing and put it upon their shoulders (9:23)

f. And they hid themselves in the trees (3:8)	f. They covered the nakedness of their father and . . . did not see (9:23)
g. And God said "Where are you?" (3:9)	g. And Noah knew what his son had done (9:24)
h. Promise through "seed" of the woman (3:15)	h. Blessing through "seed" of Shem (9:27)

In focusing on the similarities between these two narratives, the author points the reader to a recurring pattern. Just as Adam and his family fell and brought on themselves a curse (3:17), so Noah and his family fell and brought on themselves a curse (9:25). It appears that the two stories are being cast as "fall" narratives. After creation, humankind's enjoyment of God's blessing was lost in the fall. After the flood, humankind's enjoyment of God's good gifts were again lost in a "fall." Noah, like Adam, fell, and the effects of that fall were felt in the generations of his sons and daughters. As with the fall of Adam and Eve, the effect of Noah's sin was seen in his "nakedness" (v.22; cf. 2:25; 3:7).

When read in the context of the events of the garden of Eden (ch. 3), the allusive details of this story of Noah's drunkenness become remarkably transparent. Thus in a subtle parody of man's original state ("[They] were both naked, and felt no shame," 2:25), Noah "uncovered himself in his tent" (lit. trans.).

In Genesis 3 we learned that the fall was not the end of God's care and provision for humankind. Blessing, not curse, is God's final word to Adam and Eve. So also the curse in Genesis 9 is not God's final word either for Noah or his sons. In both narratives God's final word is one of blessing. That final word comes to us readers in the poems that form the conclusions of both stories (3:15; 9:25 – 27). The theme of hope is woven into the conclusion of these poems. In the midst of judgment there is the hope of divine salvation. In each case the hope is grounded in divine grace. It comes in the expression of a divine promise of a redeemer for all humanity (3:15), which is picked up and made a part of the future of Noah's three sons (9:25 – 27). Ultimately the promise is grounded in a covenant God will make with Abraham and his "seed."

20 – 27 The author gives us only the bare essentials of the story of Noah's drunkenness. Noah became drunk, uncovered himself, and lay naked in his tent.

His son Ham looked on his father's nakedness and spoke of it to his brothers (v.22). Shem and Japheth did not look on Noah's nakedness (v.23). Instead, they walked backward toward their father and covered his nakedness. An initial clue to the significance of the contrast between the actions of the sons is seen in the similarities noted above between this story and the account of the fall in ch. 3. In covering their father's nakedness, for example, Shem and Japheth (cf. *šnēhem*, v.23; lit., "the two of them"; NIV, "their"; cf. 2:25; 3:7) were like God (3:21), who did not look on the nakedness of Adam and Eve (3:7) but instead covered it with coats of skin (cf. 2:25).

There have been numerous attempts to explain the elusive details of the story. Most never get beyond the obvious questions. Why was Ham's son, Canaan, cursed instead of Ham? Why is Shem blessed? Or is it Shem's God who is blessed ("blessed by the LORD, the God of Shem")? What does it mean that Japheth "will dwell in the tents of Shem"? The simple and solitary fact that emerges from a close reading of this story is that we are not allowed even a partial answer to such questions.We are given only a few seemingly unconnected details that allow us to trace a basic pattern.

This suggests that what is important to the writer is the pattern itself and not the meaning of the specific details of the story. In this pattern we find the clue to the story's meaning. As noted in the chart above, the pattern of events in the story of Noah's fall is virtually identical to the pattern of events in the story of Adam's fall. Both "falls" included the deeds of both the fathers and the sons. Adam has three sons, and their lives play out the consequences of their father's "fall" (Ge 3 – 4). Noah also has three sons, and their lives play out the consequences of their father's "fall."

This pattern, as we have suggested, results in our being given not one, but two fall stories in the early chapters of Genesis. Just as Adam fell immediately after creation, so also Noah fell immediately after his rescue from the flood. The point of both stories plays on a common theme in Genesis and the Pentateuch: human history is a history of human failure and divine judgment. God's intended good in creation is immediately marred and corrupted by human failure. Just as God's good creation was destined to destruction, so also God's work of recreation following the flood is marred by increasing human failure.

Neither story, however, ends on a note of failure. There is more to both stories than judgment; there is also a word of salvation to be found in these stories, particularly in the poems that draw each of the stories to their conclusions. As with the narratives in Genesis 1 – 11, the overall sense of these two "fall" stories is to be found in the poems that form their conclusions (3:15 and 9:25 – 27).

The poems give these stories grounds for hope and salvation. They each contain an important promise: the coming "seed." To discover the sense of these poems one must look closely at how they focus on the "seed" of the woman and the sons of Noah. As the genealogies in Genesis show, the importance of Noah's son Shem lies in his being the central link between the "seed" promised to Eve (Adam) in 3:15 and the "seed" promised to Abraham in 22:18. Shem is the one through whom the promised blessing will come to Abraham and, through him, to the world. So it will be in Abraham's "seed" that the author will set forth his final case for regaining the lost way of blessing: "Abraham believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteous ness" (15:6).

6. The Line of Noah (10:1 – 32)

OVERVIEW

The author's purpose in recording this extensive list of names is seen in the final statement of ch. 10: "From these the nations [*haggôyim*] spread out over the earth after the flood" (v.32). In these names the reader is given a panoramic view of the nations as a backdrop for the rest of Genesis.The list is complex and shows many signs of selection and shaping to fit a pattern. The pattern that emerges is structured around the number "seventy"— seventy nations are represented in the list. Like other biblical "genealogies" (e.g., Mt 1; see D. A. Carson, "Matthew," EBC, 8:68 – 69), this list of names is shaped by a kind of "numerical symbolism" in which the concept of a totality of nations (*gôyim*) is expressed in the number "seventy."

In the number "seventy," this list of nations (*gôyim*), in principle, includes each and every nation, named or not. "Seventy" suggests that all nations are

members of the family of Noah and his three sons. Humanity in its *totality* is circumscribed. There is a unity in the human family that the author wants to keep in full view. It is out of this one humanity that Abraham will be called in ch. 12. It is also this humanity as a totality that is the object of the blessing promised to Abraham: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (12:3b).

Though the author is on the verge of narrowing his focus to the “seed” of Abraham, he first lays a foundation for God’s ultimate purpose in calling Abraham: through his “seed,” God’s blessing will be offered to “all peoples on earth” (12:3b). The “seed” of Abraham is later identified as an individual king from the tribe of Judah (49:8 – 12).The apostle Paul sees this and applies it to Jesus (Gal 3:16).

It is not without purpose that the author reminds us that the total number of Abraham’s “seed” at the close of the book is also “seventy” (46:27; cf. Ex 1:5). Before Abraham, the nations (*gôyim*) numbered “seventy.” After Abraham, at the close of the book, the seed of Abraham also numbers “seventy,” the same as that of the nations. He who was taken from the nations has reached the number of the nations. Such attention to detail suggests the author has in mind a specific understanding of the role of the “seed” of Abraham. By correlating the number of nations with the number of the seed of Abraham, he holds Abraham’s “seed” before the reader as a “new humanity” and Abraham himself as a kind of “second Adam,” the “father of many nations [*gôyim*]” (Ge 17:5). In this chosen “seed” God’s original blessing at creation (1:28) will be restored (22:18).

There is, then, much theological reflection behind the shaping of these sections of Genesis. In Deuteronomy 32:8, Moses alludes to this chapter when he says, “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.”

Compositionally, ch. 10 is also more than merely a list of seventy names. Throughout the list the author inserts several brief historical notes (vv.8 – 12, 14, 19, 25). It is important to pay careful attention to these notes. Each of them is of special relevance to a particular event yet to be recorded in Genesis. The note about Nimrod and his kingdom in Babylon, for example, provides a wider

context for the narrative of the tower of Babel in ch. 11.

NOTE

1 – 32 Cassuto notes that if Nimrod is counted along with the others, there are seventy-one names rather than an even seventy. Thus he excludes Nimrod from the list.While it is true that Nimrod occurs as part of a narrative insertion (vv.8 – 12) and his introduction — וְכוּשׁ יָלַד (*wᵉkûš yālad*,' "Cush was the father of," v.8) — is really a duplication of the list of the sons of Cush in v.7 — וּבְנֵי כוּשׁ- (*ûbᵉnê kûš*, "The sons of Cush") — the construction *wekûš yaìlad* is continued by וּמִצְרַיִם יָלַד (*ûmiṣrayim yālad*,' "Mizraim was the father of," v.13) and וּכְנַעַן יָלַד (*ûkᵉnaʿan yālad*, "Canaan was the father of," v.15). It is thus an integral part of the narrative.

In all likelihood it is the Philistines (v.14) who are not to be counted in the seventy, since they are not connected through the languages of genealogy to any of the sons of Noah in this chapter. The reference to the Philistines in v.14 is merely an historical and geographical footnote. We should also note that the cities of Nimrod's kingdom (vv.10 – 12) and the cities that mark the borders of Canaan (v.19) are not reckoned as part of the seventy nations, and Assyria (v.11) is only to be counted once (in v.22.)

The key words that provide the framework for the arrangement of this list of names are מִשְׁפָּחוֹת (*mišpᵉḥōt*, "clans"), אֲרָצוֹת (*ʾarṣōt*, "territories"), and לְשֹׁנֹת (*lᵉšōnōt*, languages"; vv.5, 20, 31 – 32). These words link ch. 10 with chs. 11 and 12. Chapter 11 takes up the theme of the division of languages, *lᵉšōnōt*, but uses the term שָׂפָה (*śāpâ*, "language"). Chapter 12 takes up the theme of both the "lands," *ʾarṣōt* (12:1: לֶךְ־לְךָ מֵאַרְצְךָ, *lek-lᵉḵā mēʾarṣᵉḵā*, "Leave your country"), and the "families," *mišpᵉḥōt* (12:3: כֹּל מִשְׁפְּחֹת הָאֲדָמָה, *kōl mišpᵉḥōt hāʾăḏāmâ*, "all peoples on earth").

NOTES

25 Why was Canaan cursed rather than Ham? It is common in the narratives of Genesis to anticipate the deeds of later generations in the acts of their fathers. For example, the narratives of Jacob and Esau foreshadow the affairs of Israel and Edom; the narratives about Lot foreshadow Israel's relationship to the Ammonites and Moabites; the narratives of Joseph and Judah anticipate the relationships between the later kingdoms of Israel and Judah. Thus it is not unusual that this narrative should anticipate and foreshadow the events relating

to the Canaanites (e.g., 19:5 – 9) in the sin of Ham as well as their subsequent ser vice to the Israelites from the time of Joshua (Jos 16:10: וַיְהִי לְמַס עֹבֵד, *wayᵉhî lᵉmas-ᶜōbēd*, "but are required to do forced labor") to the kings (1Ki 9:21: לְמַס-עֹבֵד, *lᵉmas-ᶜobed*, "for his labor force").

Note that the form of the verb יִהְיֶה (*yihyeh*) is imperfect and not jussive (as וִיהִי, *wîhî*, in vv.26 – 27); so this is a prediction ("he will be") rather than a malediction ("May he be").

26 Several questions arise in this verse. We should first note that it begins with a new introduction — וַיֹּאמֶר (*wayyōʾmer*, "He also said") — thus marking it off from v.25 and making them two distinct statements. This suggests that some importance lies in the change from the imperfect יִהְיֶה (*yihyeh*, "he will be") in v.25 to the jussive yhiywI (*wîhî*, "May he be") in vv.26 – 27. In contrast to the jussive, the imperfect is an indicative statement regarding the future of Canaan, whereas the jussive signals a wish.

But what is the wish expressed in 9:26b and 27b? If read along with v.25, as most commentators do, the wish appears to be that of a curse — "May Canaan be a servant to them [his brothers]/to him [Shem]." Consequently the suggestion of Ibn Ezra and others that the plural suffix wOml; (*laƒÊm*o) refers to God as well as Shem has been discounted, since "ser vice to the true God cannot be thought of as a curse" (Jacob, 266). However, if a curse of Canaan is not intended in vv.26 – 27, as the change in verbal forms and the additional *wayyo*ì,*mer* in v.26 suggests, then Ibn Ezra's reading is acceptable: "May Canaan be a servant.. . ."

But to whom does the suffix *laƒÊmo* refer? By its form *laƒÊmo* is a contraction of wOmhul; (*laƒÊhum*o), which yields ìh,l; (*laìhem*); thus it is a masculine plural, "to them" (Bauer and Leander, *Historische Grammatik*, 215). Joulon (*Grammaire*, 103f.), GKC (par. 103g), and König (*Genesis*, 388) suggest the *laƒÊmo* may be a rare pausal form of wOl (*lô*; cf. LXX aujtouç, *autou*), as in Isaiah 44:15. In any event, if *laƒÊmo* is read as a plural, its antecedent may be "his brothers" (wyj;a,l], *l*$_{e}$,*eh.aìyw*) in the preceding verse (cf. *Tg. Onq.* and *Tg. Neof. I*), which is unlikely because each line presents a sense complete in itself (König, *Genesis*, 388); or the antecedent of "them" may be the plural yheúloa' (,$_{e}$*loƒÊh*e, "God of ") of v.26a, "May Canaan be a servant of God" (cf. Ecc 12:1;

König, *Syntax*, par. 263c). If that is the case, which seems likely, and if vv.26 – 27 are not a curse but a form of blessing (see above), then the sense of this verse would be, "May Canaan serve him (the God of Shem)," a sense much in keeping with the scope of the blessing in the narratives that follow — "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Ge 12:3).Thus God's intended blessing for the Canaanites is anticipated in Noah's words to Canaan.

27 Who will dwell in the tents of Shem? Grammatically there are two acceptable answers. Either God (*f*Êyhuiloae, ,אֱלֹהִים *>elōhîm*) or Japheth may be the subject of וְיִשְׁכֹּן (*uʿyiškōn,*"may live"). It is not unusual for the object of a clause to become the subject of the following clause (cf. 4:17; 16:6b; 40:4).The fact that hwhy (*yhwh*, "the LORD") is always the subject of שָׁכַן (*šākān,*"to rest"), and never ,*elofÊhi*m, is a strong argument for reading Japheth as the subject: "May [Japheth] live in the tents of Shem" — meaning, May Japheth enjoy the blessing along with Shem. Thus the hope of future blessing for the family of Noah is depicted in the same imagery found in the later narratives — the future ideal of brothers living together in harmony (cf. Ge 13:8; 33:4; 36:6 – 8; Ps 133:1).

a. The sons of Noah (10:1)

11This is the account of Shem, Ham and Japheth, Noah's sons, who themselves had sons after the fl ood.

COMMENTARY

1 Chapter 10 is bracketed at either end (vv.1, 32) with an identification of the list of names as "Noah's sons" and the temporal marker "after the flood." The author's purpose is to ensure that the list in ch. 10 not be read outside the context of the flood narrative. Such conspicuous attention to context is typical of the author of the Pentateuch and, in this case, an indication that he has a strategy to unfold in this narrative.

b. The sons of Japheth (10:2 – 5)

[2]The sons of Japheth:
Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech and Tiras.
[3]The sons of Gomer:
Ashkenaz, Riphath and Togarmah.
[4]The sons of Javan:
Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim and the Rodanim. 5(From these the maritime peoples spread out into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.)

COMMENTARY

2 – 5 The list begins with those from the "maritime peoples" (cf. v.5). They are the nations that make up the geographical horizon of the author, the outer fringe of the known world.

A pattern is already discernible in the list of the sons of Japheth. Fourteen names are listed: seven sons of Japheth (v.2), then seven grandsons (vv.3 – 4). The author omits the sons of five of the seven sons of Japheth (Magog, Madai, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras), listing lists only the sons of Gomer and Javan (vv.3 – 4). Thus his intention is not to give an exhaustive list but rather a "complete" list, one that for him is obtained in the number "seven." The number "seven" is a complete unit that represents a larger totality.

c. The sons of Ham (10:6 – 20)

[6] The sons of Ham:
Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan.
[7] The sons of Cush:
Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah and Sabteca.
The sons of Raamah:
Sheba and Dedan.
[8] Cush was the father of Nimrod, who grew to be a mighty warrior on the earth. [9]He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; that is why it is said, "Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD." [10]The first centers of his kingdom were Babylon, Erech, Akkad and Calneh, in Shinar. [11]From that

land he went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah [12]and Resen, which is between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city.

[13] Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, [14]Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came) and Caphtorites.

[15] Canaan was the father of Sidon his firstborn, and of the Hittites, [16]Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, [17]Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, [18]Arvadites, Zemarites and Hamathites.

Later the Canaanite clans scattered [19]and the borders of Canaan reached from Sidon toward Gerar as far as Gaza, and then toward Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, as far as Lasha.

[20] These are the sons of Ham by their clans and languages, in their territories and nations.

COMMENTARY

6 – 12 The author has carefully and intentionally shaped the list of the sons of Ham. His genealogy begins the same way as that of the sons of Japheth by naming Ham's four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan (v.6). Then, as also in the list for Japheth, the grandsons of the son first listed (Cush) are given (v.7a). Here the similarity ends. Before going on to the next son (Mizraim, v.13), the author lists the great grandsons (sons of Raamah, v.7a). The end result of such shifts is a list of names that again numbers "seven sons"; thus, according to the author's numerical logic, this is a "complete" list.

Immediately following these seven names, a narrative on the exploits of Nimrod and his cities is inserted (vv.8 – 12). This list of names breaks the numerical pattern of "sevens" that has thus far characterized the lists. The importance of the "Nimrod-narrative" (vv.8 – 12) lies in its introduction of the city of Babylon (v.10) into the list. The building of this city is the subject of the following chapter (11:1 – 9).

The connection of Assyria and Babylon in this list of names (vv.10 – 12) appears to be intentional, for elsewhere in the list in ch. 10 Assyria is identified as one of the sons of Shem (v.22).The insertion of a brief note about Babylon and its connection with Assyria (vv.10 – 11) not only introduces into the

narrative a key city, Babylon, but also separates Assyria from its natural ties to Shem (v.22).This has the effect of giving Assyria a new identity by linking it to the city of Babylon. As in Isaiah 13 – 14, where Assyria is also intentionally linked to the fate of the city of Babylon, “Babylon” has become a catchword for divine judgment. This opens the way for a general association of Babylon with divine judgment.

Under such a set of assumptions nearly any city can legitimately be called “Babylon,” or at least linked through it to a fate of divine judgment. Such intentional links between these two important cities appear to be the initial stirrings of a “larger-than-life” symbolic value for the city of Babylon, one known already in Isaiah and one fully developed in the image of “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT” in Revelation 17:5. The prophet Micah follows the same logic when he speaks of Assyria as the “land of Nimrod” (Mic 5:6).

13 – 20 The author returns to the genealogy of the sons of Ham with a list of the sons of Mizraim, which once again contains seven names (vv.13 – 14). This is the last list to be shaped by the numerical pattern of seven. The remainder of the lists of names appears to be influenced by no particular numerical pattern except that they collectively resolve into a total number of “seventy nations.” Since it is clear that the author of the “list of the sons of Noah” has intentionally worked out a final pattern of seventy names, it is likely that, where it is found, the pattern of the smaller lists of seven names is also intentional. As with the number “seventy,” the idea of “completeness” likely lies behind the number “seven.”

Thus for those lists that contain seven names, we may conclude that the author intends to give a “complete” accounting of the sons of that group without actually listing all the sons. The author, as it were, passes over them without further comment, having included them symbolically in the whole of the sons represented by the seven names actually listed.

With the lists that now occupy the attention of the author (those that do not number in the “sevens,” vv.15 – 29), the focus is more comprehensive. In this section of the list the focus is on the Canaanites and the sons of Shem. It is those nations that play a more prominent role in the subsequent narratives in Genesis.

d. The sons of Shem (10:21 – 31)

[21]Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was Japheth; Shem
was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber.
[22]The sons of Shem:
Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud and Aram.
[23]The sons of Aram:
Uz, Hul, Gether and Meshech.
[24]Arphaxad was the father of Shelah, and Shelah the father of Eber.
[25]Two sons were born to Eber:
One was named Peleg, because in his time the earth was divided; his
brother was named Joktan.
[26]Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah,
[27]Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, [28]Obal, Abimael, Sheba, [29]Ophir, Havilah and
Jobab. All these were sons of Joktan.
[30]The region where they lived stretched from Mesha toward Sephar, in
the eastern hill country.
[31]These are the sons of Shem by their clans and languages, in their
territories and nations.

COMMENTARY

21 – 31 The author begins the list of the sons of Shem with a prosaic introduction (v.21), whose purpose is to retrace the lines of continuity through ch. 10. In doing so, the author calls attention to the relationship of Shem and Japheth (“Shem, the older brother of Japheth,” NIV mg.) and the relationship of Shem to the following generations (“Shem was the ancestor of all the sons of Eber”). The mention of the “sons of Eber” anticipates the genealogy that lies ahead, the one that results in the birth of Abraham (11:10 – 26). Before moving on to complete the list of the sons of Noah, the author inserts a brief summary to tie the list to the preceding and following contexts.

The line of Shem is traced to the two sons of Eber and from there continues to follow the line of the second son, Joktan (vv.26 – 29). A second genealogy of Shem is repeated after the account of the building of the city of Babylon (11:1 – 9). From there the line continues to Abraham through the first son of Eber, that

is, Peleg (11:10 – 26). In arranging the genealogy of Shem in this way, the author draws a dividing line through the descendants of Shem on either side of the story of Babylon. The dividing line falls between the two sons of Eber, that is, Peleg and Joktan. One line leads to the building of Babylon and the other to the family of Abraham.

The author supplies a hint regarding this division of the line of Shem with his comment that in Peleg's day "the land was divided" (v.25). Peleg's name means "divided." As is commonly the case throughout the biblical narratives, the mention of "land" is an abbreviated reference to the "inhabitants of the land." Thus not only is the land divided by the confusion of languages (11:1), but also, and more fundamentally, two great lines of humanity diverge from the midst of the sons of Shem: those who seek to make a name (Shem) for themselves in the building of the city of Babylon (11:4), and those for whom God will make a name in the call of Abraham (12:2).

NOTES

25 The note, "in his [פֶּלֶג, *peleg*, 'Peleg's'] time the earth [הָאָרֶץ, *hāʾāreṣ*] was divided [נִפְלְגָה, *nipᵉlgâ*]," provides the narrative clue to the structure of the genealogies of chs. 10 and 11.The genealogy of Shem in 10:21 – 31 is traced from Shem to the sons of Joktan, the brother of Peleg. After the account of the building of the city of Babylon, the genealogy of Shem is taken up again and traced through Peleg to Abraham (11:10 – 26). One line of Shem ends in Babylon and the other in the land with Abraham.

30 What is the function of this obscure note regarding the homeland of those from the line of Joktan? Ostensively it is to give the location of the settlement of the line, but narratively it serves to connect the line of Joktan with the account of the building of Babylon that follows.The link is made by means of the term ìd, הַר הַקֶּדֶם(*har haqqedem*, lit., "mountain of the east"; NIV, "eastern hill country"). The narrative is apparently less interested in the exact location as it is in the association with the ìמִקֶּדֶם (*miqqedem*, "east-ward") of 11:2, the location of the "plain of Shinar," where the city of Babylon was built.

e. Epilogue (10:32)

[32]These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.

COMMENTARY

32 In this epilogue to ch. 10 the author again takes up the theme of the division of the nations —"From these the nations spread out over the earth"— to provide a context for the narrative of the city of Babylon that follows. What is described "geographically and linguistically" in ch. 10 will be described "theologically" in ch. 11, namely, God's dispersion of the nations from Babylon.

E. The City of Babylon (11:1 – 9)

[1]Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. [2]As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there.

[3]They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. [4]Then they said,"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

[5]But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. [6]The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. [7]Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

[8]So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. [9]That is why it was called Babel — because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

COMMENTARY

1 – 9 It is important to consider the strategic location of the account of the building of Babylon within the lists of names in chs. 10 and 11. The account of Babylon is located between two genealogies, both traced from Shem: first, the line that extends from Shem (10:22) through Eber (v.24) through Joktan (vv.26 – 29), and second, the line extending from Shem (11:10) through Eber (v.14) through Peleg (v.17). As it is presently situated in the text, the account of the founding of the city of Babylon falls at the end of the list of fourteen names from the line of Joktan (10:26 – 29). At the end of the list of the ten names of the line of Peleg, however, is the account of the call of Abraham (11:27 – 12:10).

Thus, there are two great lines of the descendants of Shem that divide into the two sons of Eber (10:25). One finds its destination in the city of Babylon, the other in the house of Abraham. It is hard not to see this positioning of the account of Babylon as deliberate on the part of the author of Genesis, especially in light of the continuous interplay between the name Shem (*šēm*) and the quest for making "a name" (*šēm*) both in the account of the building of Babylon (11:4) and in the account of God's election of Abraham (12:2).

The story of the building of Babylon opens outside the "plain in Shinar" (v.2). The narrative specifically notes that the builders "moved eastward" (*miqqedem*) to the plain, where they founded the city. It is significant that the author orients the story with such geographical details. As early as Genesis 3 the author has shown an interest in marking the directions of travel taken in humankind's search for a home. When the man and his wife were driven from the garden because they had appropriated the knowledge of good and evil for themselves, they were made to settle in a land "eastward" (*miqqedem*) from the garden (3:24). When Cain was cast out of the presence of God because he refused God's instruction, he went to dwell in a land "east of Eden" (*qidmat*, 4:16). When Lot divided from Abraham and sought for himself a land "like the garden of the LORD," he moved "toward the east" (*miqqedem*, 13:11). In the light of such intentional uses of the notion of "eastward" within the Genesis narratives, we can see that here too the author intentionally draws the story of the founding of Babylon into the larger scheme at work throughout the book.

The central question surrounding the story of the building of Babylon is why God judged the builders of the city. Though the story is brief, the author has left

the reader with definite, though subtle, indications of the story's meaning. The clues lie in the repetition of key words in the story, words that tie it to the larger narrative context. We have already noted the importance of the word "name" (*šēm*) within the larger context of chs. 10 – 12. Also, within the story itself the word *šēm* plays a central role. First, according to the builders of the city, their reason for building it was "to make a name [*šēm*]" for themselves (v.4). The conclusion of the story returns to the "name" (*šēm*) of the city, ironically associating Babylon/Babel with the confusion (*bālal*) of their language (v.9). Thus the builders' attempt to make a name for themselves is a central feature of the story both in terms of its internal structure and its linkage to the surrounding narratives.

Second, the term "scattered" (*pûṣ*, v.4) is a key word that ties the story together, both internally and externally, with the surrounding narratives. The narrative is clear that the purpose of the city was to prevent its inhabitants from being "scattered [*pûṣ*] over the face of the whole earth" (v.4). Ironically, at the conclusion of the story it is the Lord who "scattered" (*pûṣ*) the builders of the city "over the face of the whole earth" (v.8). This is repeated twice at the conclusion (vv.8 – 9).

The expression "the whole land" (*kol-hāʾāreṣ*) is a third important term in the story. The people left "the whole land [NIV, 'world']" (v.1) to build a city in the east. Its purpose was to keep them from being scattered throughout "the whole land" (*kol hāʾāreṣ*, v.4). In response, the Lord reversed their plan and scattered them over "all the land" (*kol hāʾāreṣ*, vv.8 – 9).

As Cain went eastward (*qidmat-ʾēden*, 4:16) and built a city (4:17), the people of Babylon, who were once united, left their land, moved "eastward," and founded their own (*lānû*, v.4; NIV, "ourselves") city. There they were to make a name *for themselves* (*lānû*). God, who saw that their plans might very well succeed, moved to rescue them from those very plans and return them to the divine blessing that awaited them.

NOTES

1 The meaning of כָּל־הָאָרֶץ (*kol-hāʾāreṣ*, "the whole land [NIV, 'world']") is limited here to a specific location, since the following verse says that the "men moved eastward" and found the valley where they built the city of Babylon. Thus the

narrative pictures the founding of the city of Babylon at the end of a migration of people from the west.

The sense of שָׂפָה אֶחָת (*śāpâ ʾeḥāt*, "one language") parallels דְּבָרִים אֲחָדִים (*dᵉbārim ʾăḥādîm*) that these people all spoke the same language (NIV, "a common speech"). This theme that is further developed (e.g., עַם אֶחָד, *ʿam ʾeḥād*, "one people"]) in v.6. This also appears to be the sense of later interbiblical allusions to this narrative, e.g., שְׂפַת כְּנַעַן (*śᵉpat kᵉnaʿan*, "the language of Canaan," Isa 19:18).

1 – 9 There are many wordplays and alliterations in this small narrative.

1. Same consonants
a. v.2b שִׁנְעָר וַיֵּשְׁבוּ שָׁם (*šinʿār wayyēšᵉbû šām*, "Shinar and settled there")
b. v.3a נִלְבְּנָה לְבֵנִים (*nilbᵉnâ lᵉbēnîm*, "let's make bricks")
c. v.3a נִשְׂרְפָה לִשְׂרֵפָה (*niśrᵉpâ liśrēpâ*, "[let's] bake them thoroughly [lit., 'with fi re']")
d. v.3b הַלְּבֵנָה לְאָבֶן (*hallᵉbēnâ lᵊāben*, "brick instead of stone")
e. v.3b הַחֵמָר ... לַחֹמֶר (*haḥēmār ... laḥōmer*, "tar instead of mortar")
f. v.4a נִבְנֶה־לָּנוּ (*nibneh-lānû*, "let us build ourselves")
g. v.4a בַּשָּׁמַיִם ... שֵׁם (*baššāmayim ... šēm*, "to the heavens . . . a name")
h. v.5a וַיֵּרֶד יהוה לִרְאֹת אֶת־הָעִיר (*wayyēred yhwh liʾōt ʾet-hāʿîr*, "But the LORD came down to see the city")
i. v.5b בָּנוּ בְּנֵי (*bānû bᵉnê*, "the men were building" [lit., "they built, the men"])
j. v.7b שָׁם שְׂפָתָם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אִישׁ שִׂפַת רֵעֵהוּ (*šām śᵉpātām ʾăšer lōʾ yišmᶜû ʾîš śᵉpat rēʿēhû*, "confuse their language so they will not understand each other")
k. v.9a בָּבֶל בָּלַל (*bābel ... bālal*, "Babel . . . [he] confused")
2. Similar consonants
a. v.3b הַחֵמָר הָיָה לָהֶם לַחֹמֶר (*haḥēmār hāyâ lāhem laḥōmer*, "tar instead of mortar")
b. v.4a רֹאשׁוֹ בַּשָּׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָּנוּ שֵׁם (*rōʾšô baššāmayim wᵉnaʿᵃseh-lānû šēm*, "reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves")
c. v.7a שָׁם שְׂפָתָם (*šām śᵉpātām*, "[there] confuse their language")
d. v.8a אֹתָם מִשָּׁם (*ʾotām miššām*, "them from there")
e. v.9b מִשָּׁם הֱפִיצָם (*miššām hᵉpîṣām*, "from there [he] scattered them")
3. Reversed same consonants
a. v.4 פֶּן־נָפוּץ (*pen-nāpûṣ*, "not [lit., 'lest'] be scattered")
b. v.3a נִלְבְּנָה (*nilbᵉnâ*, "let's make"), [v.7] נָבְלָה (*noblâ*, "[let's] confuse")
4. Reversed similar consonants
a. v.2b בְּאֶרֶץ ... וַיִּמְצְאוּ (*wayyimṣᵊû ... bᵉʾereṣ*, lit., "and they found . . . in the land of

[NIV untrans.]")
b. v.7b שָׂפָה (*śpat*, "language"), [v.8a] וַיָּפֶץ (*wayyāpeṣ*, "so [he] scattered")

Cassuto, 232ff., has noted other wordplays as well as the fact that throughout the narrative the central theme of Babylon (בָּבֶל, *bābel*) is echoed in the recurrence of the consonants b ב (*b*) and l ל (*l*). This is similar to the recurrence of the name "Isaac" (יִצְחָק, *yiṣḥāq*) throughout the patriarchal narratives (see comments on ch. 17) and "Noah" (= "grace") in the early chapters of Genesis (e.g., 6:8).

F. The Line of Shem (11:10 – 26)

10 This is the account of Shem.
Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father of Arphaxad. 11 And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.
12 When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. 13 And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.
14 When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. 15 And after he became the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.
24 When Nahor had lived 29 years, he became the father of Terah. 25 And after he became the father of Terah, Nahor lived 119 years and had other sons and daughters.
26 After Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

COMMENTARY

10 – 26 This list of ten descendants of Shem performs a function similar to that of the list of ten descendants of Adam in ch. 5. It draws a direct line from Noah to Abraham and bypasses all others (10:26 – 30). The list closely resembles the list of the ten descendants of Adam (5:1 – 32). A comparison of the use of the two lists within the larger narrative suggests they are both a result of the careful attention given by the author to the final shape of the text.

In ch. 5, the list of ten patriarchs from Adam to Noah provides the necessary linkage between the "offspring" promised to the woman (3:15) and the offspring of Noah, the survivor of the flood (7:23). The promised "seed" has survived the flood. Not only does the list in ch. 5 mark the "line of the promise," but as suggested above, it is also the means for bypassing the other line that lies within view of the author of Genesis, that is, the line of Cain (4:17 – 22). Cain's line also consisted of ten individuals representing the builders of the city (4:17) and the civilization (vv.20 – 24) that was destroyed in the flood.

The list in ch. 5 is thus evidence of considerable theological reflection on the promise to the woman in 3:15. Its focus is on the names of those who bear the "seed" of the woman. It personalizes the promised "seed." It also demonstrates that the author is conscious of the impending failure of the line of Cain and the city they build. The judgment and destruction that await that city, however, do not mean an end to God's promise. Noah will survive and his offspring will continue to carry the hope of that promise.

Such theological reflection achieves full expression in the words of the woman at the birth of Seth: "God has granted me another child [*zera*< <*ah*.*e*ìr, lit., 'another seed'] in place of Abel, since Cain killed him" (4:25). There are two seeds — that which belongs to the line of Cain and that which belongs to the line of the woman. The line of Cain may rise up against the seed of the woman, but God provides another seed in place of the one who was slain. The line of Cain may lead to the judgment of the flood, but God preserves the line of Seth through which the promised "seed" will come.

The same kind of theological reflection on the divine promise in 3:15 lies behind the list of ten names in 11:10 – 26. Here too the author's aim is to show that God's promise concerning the seed of the woman cannot be thwarted by the confusion and scattering of the nations at Babylon. Though the family of Noah was scattered at Babylon, God preserved a line of ten men that carried the "seed" from Noah to Abraham. Out of the ruins of two great cities, the city of Cain and the city of Babylon, God preserves the promised "seed." The line of promise continues with Shem (11:10) and finds its destination in Abraham and a new promise about his "seed."

Note

26 Numbering from Shem to Terah, the list has nine names. The LXX has a tenth name, Kainan (Kainan, *Kainan*), the father of jl/v, (*šelah*., “Shelah,” v.12). This is probably an attempt to adapt the list to the scheme of ten names. Jacob, 304, suggests that the number ten was intended by reading Noah with both the list in ch. 5 and (from 9:28) the list in ch. 11. The number ten may also be obtained by reading Abraham as the last name (11:26b). That, of course, arbitrarily excludes Nahor and Haran, who are named after Abram at the close of the list.

As is often the case with the numerical symmetry of the lists in Genesis, the numbers are close, but some adding and subtracting is necessary in the end. One might be tempted to draw the conclusion that if the numbers are not always perfect, it means that the apparent symmetry was not intentional. However, the fact that some adding and subtracting is necessary even when the narrative does the final counting (e.g., 46:27) shows that a purpose lies behind this numerical symmetry, even though that symmetry is sometimes less precise.

II. Abraham (11:27 – 25:11)

A. The Line of Abraham (11:27 – 32)

[27]This is the account of Terah.

Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. [28]While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. [29]Abram and Nahor both married. 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 both Milcah and Iscah. [30]Now Sarai was barren; she had no children.

[31]Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there.

[32]Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

COMMENTARY

27 – 32 Still another genealogy precedes the narrative about Abraham — the family of Terah. The purpose of Terah's genealogy is not so much to connect Abraham with the preceding events, as the previous genealogies have done, but to provide the reader with the necessary background for understanding the events in the life of Abraham. At this point we know little about Abraham, save for the information in Terah's genealogy.

Interspersed in the list of names in Terah's genealogy are several historical notes about Terah and his family. We are told, for example, about the premature death of Haran (11:28), the marriage of Abraham and Sarah, and the marriage of Abraham's brother Nahor to Milcah (v.30).A seemingly minor piece of information about Abraham and Sarah is recounted in v.30: "Sarah was barren, she had no child." As it will turn out, Sarah's barrenness becomes the central story line of the narrative that follows. Finally, we learn that Terah and his

family, including Abraham and Lot, leave Ur of the Chal-deans and travel as far as Haran. We also learn from this genealogy that they are all enroute to the land of Canaan (v.32). Somewhat surprisingly, they all take up residence in Haran until the death of Terah. Only then do Abraham and his family continue their journey to Canaan.

There is no mention of the call of God on Terah or Abraham and his family in the genealogical sections. That narrative begins in 12:1. Judging from the sequence of the narrative, God's call of Abraham (12:1) appears to have been after the death of Terah (11:32b). The impression is that Abraham receives his call to leave his homeland while in Haran after the death of his father, Terah, while he lived in Ur of the Chaldeans. There is a further hint of that notion in the narrative in 12:4 – 5, which recounts Abraham's obedient response to the call of God and explicitly states that he "set out from Haran" (v.4b), with no mention of Ur of the Chaldeans.

There is thus some ambiguity concerning the question of when and where God called Abraham. Which way does the author intend us to read the narrative? Are there implications of our reading this narrative either way? The answer lies in viewing the narrative as a whole and watching for any helps the author may send our way. We will suggest below that when and where God calls Abraham does indeed matter to the author, who wants us to see Abraham's call as occurring in "Ur of the Chal-deans," not merely in Haran. For the author, "Ur of the Chaldeans" is understood as "Babylon." By recounting Abraham's call from "Ur of the Chal-deans," the author aims to cast the patriarch as one who came out of Babylon.

Let us briefly follow the author's line of thought. In 11:27 – 32, the author identifies Ur of the Chal-deans, rather than Haran, as the birthplace of Abraham's brother Nahor (v.28) and by implication of Abraham too. In v.31 Terah and his family leave Ur of the Chaldeans to travel to Haran. When the command is given to Abraham to leave the place of his birth (12:1; NIV, "your country"), only Ur of the Chaldeans would be understood, despite the fact that the narrative of ch. 12 makes no mention of "Ur."

The role of 11:27 – 32 in providing the "geographical context" of ch. 12 is crucial, especially in light of the author's close attention to "geography" in

working out other key themes in Genesis. That the author understands Abraham's call as a call to leave "Ur of the Chaldeans," that is, a call to leave Babylon, is confirmed by a later reference to that call in 15:7. Confirmation of this reading of these narratives comes from Nehemiah 9:7 and Acts 7:2 – 3. Both locate the call of Abraham not in Haran but in Ur.

As we have suggested, the importance of this detail goes far beyond the question of harmonizing the various biblical accounts. By putting the call of Abraham within the setting of Abraham's dwelling in "Ur of the Chaldeans," the author is able to align his narrative with similar themes that later prove central in the prophetic literature. For Isaiah, the "glory of the Chaldeans" (Isa 13:19, NIV mg.) is the city of Babylon that God will overturn "like Sodom and Gomorrah" (cf. 48:14b). In Jeremiah (cf. NIV mg. of Jer 24:5; see also 25:12; 50:1, 8, 35, 45; 51:24, 54) and Ezekiel (Eze 1:3; 12:13; 23:15, 23), the Chaldeans are those who live in the city of Babylon and have taken God's people into captivity.

Thus, it is in line with these prophets that the author of Genesis puts Abraham's call in the context of "Ur of the Chaldeans," drawing a link connecting the call of Abraham (12:1 – 3) to the dispersion of the city of Babylon (11:1 – 9).Abraham thus becomes a prefigurement of future exiles who, like him, wait in faith for the coming of God's promised blessing. In a similar manner the prophet Micah pictures the remnant who await their return from exile as descendants of Abraham faithfully trusting in God's promise (Mic 7:18 – 20).

There are marked similarities between the introductions to the narrative about Abraham (12:27 – 32) and the introduction to the narrative about Isaac (25:19 – 26; see below). Such similarities indicate that the author understands the two narratives to be related. At the beginning of the Abrahamic narrative, there is a brief but necessary introduction of Nahor (v.29), who is an important character in the narratives about the quest for Isaac's bride (24:24). So also at the beginning of the narrative about Isaac, Laban (25:20), the father of the bride of Isaac's son Jacob, is given a brief introduction (28:2). In both the narratives about Abraham and about Isaac, the introductions turn quickly to the key characters: Abraham and Lot in the Abrahamic narratives, and Isaac, Jacob, and Esau in the narratives about Issac. Supporting cast is important, and the parts they play sometimes need introduction.

As an introduction to the Abrahamic narrative, the text tells us that Abraham took a wife, Sarai, and that she was barren (*ʿaqārâ*, vv.29–30). Also in the Isaac narrative, Isaac took a wife, Rebekah, who was barren (*ʿaqārâ*, 25:20–21). Unlike in the Abrahamic narratives, where the motive of barrenness occupies center stage, the barrenness of Isaac's wife is treated in a single verse (25:21). The Isaac narrative moves on to the more dominant theme of the struggle between his sons, the brothers Jacob and Esau.

Both the narratives of Abraham and those of Isaac contain a central element of struggle between brothers. We must look to the introductions of both narratives to get the necessary setting of those struggles. The struggle between Abraham and Lot, for example, appears to have been of longstanding. Abraham accompanied Lot from birth (v.27). In the same way, Esau struggled with Jacob from birth (25:22 – 24).The struggles that ensued thus stemmed from relationships of longstanding between the two sets of families:Abraham's companionship with Lot (13:7) and Jacob's companionship with Esau (chs. 25 – 28). The resolution of these struggles is ultimately separation. Abraham must "separate" from Lot (13:9, 11, 14) and Jacob must "separate" from Esau (25:23). The brothers cannot live together.

There are striking verbal parallels between the accounts of the struggles between Abraham and Lot and between Jacob and Esau. According to 13:6, for example, "the land could not support them

> [Abraham and Lot] while they stayed together [*uʿlō*ᵓ-*nāśāᵓ ᵓōtām hāᵓāreṣ lāšebet yāḥdāw*], for their possessions were so great [*kî-hāyâ rʿkûšām rāb*] that they were not able to stay together [*uʿlōᵓ yākʿlû lāšebet yaḥdāw*]." In the same manner, according to 36:7, "Their [Jacob's and Esau's] possessions were too great for them to remain together [*kî-hāyâ rʿkûšām rāb miššebet yaḥdāw*];

the land where they were staying could not support them both [*wʿlōᵓ yākʿlâ ᵓereṣ mʿgûrêhem lāśēᵓt ᵓōtām*].".." Such parallels have the effect of drawing the themes of the two narratives together so that they reinforce a central theme — the fulfillment of the blessing: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth" (1:28).

Along with the theme of "blessing," the theme of "separation" (*pānad*) so prominent in ch. 10 (vv.5, 32) continues to play an important role in the author's

purpose. The ideas that lie behind these themes recur in the final words of the Pentateuch: “When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when he divided (*pānad*) all humankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples. . . . For the LORD’s portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance” (Dt 32:8 – 9).

B. The Call of Abraham (12:1 – 9)

[1]The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and
your father’s household and go to the land I will show you.
[2]“I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you;
I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.
[3]I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”
[4]So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.
Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. [5]He took
his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated
and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of
Canaan, and they arrived there.
[6]Abram traveled through the land as far as the site of the great tree of
Moreh at Shechem. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. [7]The
LORD appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this
land.” So he built an altar there to the LORD, who had appeared to him.
[8]From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his
tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to
the LORD and called on the name of the LORD. [9]Then Abram set out and
continued toward the Negev.

COMMENTARY

1 – 5 We have suggested that by placing the call of Abraham after the dispersion of the nations at Babylon (11:1 – 9), the author pictures Abraham’s call as a divine gift of salvation in the midst of judgment. As a way of further sustaining that theme, the author has patterned the account of Abraham’s call and blessing after an earlier account of salvation in the midst of judgment — the

conclusion of the flood narrative (see comments on 8:15 – 19). The similarities between the two narratives are striking. They suggest that the arrival of Abraham on the scene, like Noah's emergence from the ark after the flood, marks a new beginning for "all humanity." It is a new beginning insofar as it is a return to God's original plan of blessing (cf. 1:28).

The theme of Abraham and his descendants marking a new beginning in God's plan of blessing is developed in a number of other ways in Genesis. Most notable is the frequent reiteration of God's "blessing" in 1:28 (and 9:1) throughout the narratives of Abraham and his descendants (e.g., 12:1 – 3; 13:15 – 16; 15:5, 18; 17:6 – 8; 22:17 – 18; 25:11; 26:2 – 4; 27:27 – 29; 49:28). The "promise to the fathers" is none other than a reiteration of God's original blessing of the human race (1:28).

To make this clear the author has given a representative list of all humanity in ch. 10 according to their "families" (v.32; NIV, "clans") and has shown how their dispersion was the result of the rebellion of the city of Babylon (11:1 – 9).These same "families of the earth" (NIV, "peoples on earth") are to be blessed in Abraham and his seed (12:3) of Abraham" is a "second Adam" who brings a new humanity. Those who "bless" him, God will bless; those who "curse" him, God will curse. The way of *life and blessing*, which was once marked by the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:17) and then by the ark (7:23b), is now marked by identification with Abraham and his seed.

The identity of the "seed" of Abraham is one of the chief themes of the following narratives. At the close of the book (49:8 – 12), a curtain on the future is drawn back and a glimpse of the future seed of Abraham is briefly allowed. This "seed" who is to come, to whom the right of kingship belongs, will be the king called the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5; cf. Ge 49:9); and "the obedience of the nations is his" (Ge 49:10). In the NT this is taken to mean that the "seed" is Christ. The importance the author attaches to the connection of the fulfillment of the "blessing" and coming of this king from the tribe of Judah can be seen in the fact that it is a part of the overall theme of the composition of the Pentateuch. As we have suggested earlier, within that compositional strategy the major poems in the Pentateuch play a central role. It is these poems that focus the reader's attention on the promised king.

To appreciate this compositional strategy, the “making” of the Pentateuch consists primarily of connecting various pieces of written texts into a single story. Among other things, this involved the insertion of several key poems at the close of the central narratives, which turn the reader’s attention to God’s future work “in the last days” (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29). As such they focus on God’s promise to send a *king* from the tribe of Judah.

These poems were not inserted into the Pentateuch in an isolated and haphazard way. Each poem is linked to the others by a network of cross-referencing. The “lion’s cub” from the tribe of Judah in 49:9, for example, is identified with Balaam’s word about a victorious “ruler” or king arising “in days to come” (Nu 24:14, 17, 19). The intent of such cross-referencing *between the poems* is to connect the images in each poem to a single composite picture. Each poem, and each cross-reference, adds its unique contribution to the whole.

Not only are there important compositional links between these poems, but there are also further links between these poems and the narratives of Genesis, particularly those that focus on the “seed” promised to Abraham. The poem in Genesis 49, for example, cites the narrative of promise in Genesis 27. Not only do the poems in Numbers 24 cite that same narrative (Ge 27), but also that narrative of promise (Ge 27) cites Genesis 12.Thus by means of these citations, or cross-references, there is a close compositional link between the poems themselves and between the poems and key “promise texts” in Genesis.

Though these cross-references have long been recognized, little importance has been attached to them. That may be due to a lack of appreciation for the role of the poems and promise texts within the Pentateuch *as a whole*. If the linking of the poems and promise texts is part of the larger compositional strategy of the Pentateuch, it means that considerable weight was being given to them in the final composition of the Pentateuch. It is important, therefore, to reexamine the connections between the poems and the promise narratives in the Pentateuch and to ask what those connections tell us about the coming king in the Pentateuch’s poetry. The answer to that question is that the poems in the Pentateuch identify the promised “*seed* of Abraham” as the coming king from Judah.

The Genesis narratives of promise center on the making of a divine promise to the “seed” of Abraham. God says to Abraham, “in your *seed* all the nations of

the earth will be blessed" (Ge 22:18, NIV mg.). The exegetical question, of course, is the identity of that "seed." Should we take it as a collective "seed" referring to a whole people, or does it refer to a specific individual? Exegetically the issue centers on Paul's statement in Galatians 3:16: "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say, 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is, Christ."

According to Burton,

> [Paul's understanding of the seed] is, of course, not the meaning of the original passage referred to. . .. [Paul] is well aware of the collective sense of the word spevrma in the Gen[esis] passage (see v.29 and Ro 4:13 – 18). He doubtless arrived at his thought, not by exegesis of scripture, but from an interpretation of history, and then availed himself of the singular noun to express his thought briefly. [Ernest De Witt Burton, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 182]

While it may not be too difficult to sympathize with Burton's comments, the cross- referencing noted above between the poetry and promise narratives in the Pentateuch could possibly have provided Paul with an important exegetical clue. Paul's seeing of an individual "seed" in the Abrahamic promise is close to, if not identical with, the idea that lies behind the distribution and interrelationship of the poems and the "promise narratives" in the Pentateuch. Paul could have been — and in all likelihood was — guided by these poems in his reading of the promise narratives in Genesis. That would have given him more exegetical grounds than Burton has allowed. In any event, in light of the conclusions Paul draws from the Pentateuch, the relationship between the poems and the promise narratives in the Pentateuch merits further study.

Before discussing the links between the poetry and the patriarchal promise narratives, we would do well to note some additional cross-referencing in the promise narratives themselves. Genesis 27:29, for example, cites 12:3, "May those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed." This is the same kind of cross-referencing we noted within the poetry of the Pentateuch. Ewald once characterized such cross-referencing as "learned quotations" (quoted in C. F. Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, The Prophecies of Jeremiah* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968], 1:102). They are the kinds of references that a well-informed "scholar" would make in citing a specific passage in a book. They suggest that the author of the narratives pondered long

and hard over the meaning of these ancient texts.

The citation of Genesis 12 within the promise narrative in Genesis 27 and 28 is an important and conspicuous connecting link between the Abrahamic promise and Jacob's blessing. It reminds us that in Abraham's *seed* (זרע 28:4) the nations will obtain God's promised blessing to Abraham. The important question for biblical commentary is the identity of the "seed" of Abraham. Is this "seed" an individual, or are we to take it as a people? The collective nature of the Hebrew word "seed" (זרע) makes either sense possible. To resolve that question, we must turn again to the poetic links in the Pentateuch, beginning with the cross-referencing between Genesis 49 and 27.

In 49:8 Jacob says to Judah, "your father's sons will bow down to you." This is a well-known cross-reference to the promise narrative in 27:29 — "and may the sons of your mother bow down to you." Here again a compositionally important poem (Ge 49) is linked to a key patriarchal promise narrative (Ge 27). The link within the "promise narratives" (27:29 and the Abrahamic blessing in Ge 12, noted above) is extended to include the king from Judah in 49:10. The "seed" of Abraham is thus linked directly to a king from Judah.

The connection between Genesis 27 and 49 has important consequences for the identity of the "seed" of Abraham. A similar "learned quotation" in the poem in Numbers 24:7 – 9 provides a further connection. It links the king in Balaam's vision to the king from Judah in Genesis 49. What 49:9 says about the lion of the tribe of Judah, Balaam applies in Numbers 24:9a to the king in his own vision. "He crouches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares arouse him?" (NASB). Thus by means of such cross-referencing (both within these poems *and* between them and the promise narratives), the king of the Pentateuch's poems is identified as the "seed" of Abraham. The commentaries generally take these "learned quotations" to be intentional. They identify the "seed" promised to Abraham (Ge 12) with the "scepter" from the tribe of Judah (49:10) and Balaam's victorious "king" (Nu 24:9, 17, 19). The "king" in each of these poems is thus linked directly to the promised "seed" of Abraham.

There is a further link between the poems and the promise narratives. Numbers 24:9b is also a "learned quotation" of the promise narrative in Genesis 27:29. In his poetic description of the coming king in Numbers 24:5 – 9, Balaam

concludes with a citation of Genesis 27:29b: “May those who bless you be blessed, and those who curse you be cursed.” Commentaries generally agree that here too the purpose of citing Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 is to identify the king in Numbers 24:7 with the promised seed of the Abrahamic blessing.

The problem, however, is that many commentators identify the “king” in Numbers 24 as a collective (cf. Nu. 24:8 in NIV, “God brought *them* out of Egypt”) and thus open the way for taking all references to the “seed” in the Genesis promise narratives as collective. The king in Numbers 24, however, cannot be understood as a collective; rather, it refers to an individual king who is contrasted with the collective people in Numbers 23 and other kings in Genesis 49. Numbers 24 intentionally identifies the “seed” of Abraham as an individual king.

Regardless of the sense of the details in these texts, there is general agreement that the citation of Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 establishes an intentional connection between all the major poems and the promise narratives in the Pentateuch. That connection lies at the highest thematic level within the Pentateuch. At that level this link identifies Abraham’s “seed” in the promise narratives with the king of Numbers 24. In addition, since the king in Numbers 24 is also identified with the king in Genesis 49, that king (in Nu 24) cannot be a collective. In Genesis 49 the king comes from the tribe of Judah and is contrasted with other kings from that tribe. Hence he can be neither a collective for the tribe or for the people. He can only be an individual king. The compositional relationship between Numbers 23 and 24 also confirms the view of the cross-referencing that the king in Numbers 24:7 refers to an individual rather than a collective (cf. John H. Sailhamer, “Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15,” *WTJ* 63 [2001]: 94 – 95).

The fact that Numbers 24 quotes the Genesis “promise narratives” (27:29), much like a modern author would quote from a printed book, suggests a sophisticated level of innertextuality within the compositional strategy of the Pentateuch. Keil himself accepted the notion that the quotation of Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 was an extension of the larger compositional strategy linking Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 27 to the blessing of Abraham’s seed in 12:3. According to him, the author in Numbers 24 “has attached to [Balaam’s oracle] the word by which Isaac had transferred the blessing of Abraham (Ge 12:3) to Jacob” (Keil, *Numbers*, 191).

Keil is clearly aware of a conscious effort within the Pentateuch to link the poems in Numbers 24 and Genesis 49 with Genesis 27 and 12. He does not, however, appear to be aware of the further implications of these connections, which are that these poems envision an individual promised "seed." For much the same reason, Procksch, 162, also acknowledges that the individual addressed in Genesis 27:29 was intentionally identified as the future recipient of the blessing of Abraham in 12:3. In each case, these scholars linked these texts to the future king of Balaam's vision.

The larger functionality of Numbers 24:9b and its relationship to Genesis 27:29 are thus clearly understood in the standard commentaries. Those commentaries, however, have sometimes been reluctant to move on to the conclusion that the royal figure in these texts is an individual. They have readily acknowledged that the cross- referencing in these texts is a sign of advanced literary (or compositional) activity. And they have acknowledged that these textual features represent intelligent design and authorial intent. No one explains them as coincidental. What the commentaries fail to see, however, is the larger purpose behind these connections.

Clearly, what is important about these inner-textual connections is that they are evidence of a larger compositional stratagem. The author of the Pentateuch is going somewhere with these texts. The connections between the poems and the promise narratives in Genesis tell us much about *the author's* understanding of the "seed" of Abraham in texts such as 12:3 – 7 and 22:18. The textual links between the patriarchal promise narratives and the focus on an individual "king" in the poems suggest a compositional strategy that intentionally identifies the "seed" (*zera*<) of Abraham with an individual king from the tribe of Judah.

It is true, of course, that at numerous points within the promise narratives the identity of the "seed" of Abraham is understood collectively. But this is not the whole truth. By intentionally linking the poetic texts and the "promise narratives," the author of the Pentateuch is moving decisively away from a merely collective reading of the promise narratives and toward an *individual* "seed of Abraham." It is hard to avoid the implication that in cases such as the quotation of Genesis 27:29 by Numbers 24:9b, the author is intentionally identifying the *individual* "king" of Balaam's oracle with the "seed" of Abraham

in the Genesis promise narratives. The king whom Balaam foresees is the individual "seed" of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed.

The interpretation of the meaning of the term "seed of Abraham" in this commentary is grounded in an understanding of the compositional strategy of the Pentateuch. The poems represent the author's final assessment of the details of the promise narratives. If these narratives are read in isolation from the Pentateuch's poems, the meaning of "seed of Abraham" could easily be understood in a collective sense. If, however, the "promise texts" are understood in terms of the poems in the Pentateuch, some of them are unquestionably individual in scope. Hence, in terms of the final compositional strategy of the Pentateuch, a central identity of the "seed" of Abraham is with the *individual* king from the tribe of Judah.

The negative direction taken by the narratives dealing with the sons ("seed") of Abraham throughout the remainder of the book shows that that "seed" as such was not the primary "seed" the author had in view in these promise texts. The picture of the growing failure of the physical "seed" of Abraham points the reader to the hope for another "seed," namely, the royal "seed" of the Pentateuch's poems.

6 – 9 The account of Abraham's entry into the land of Canaan is selective. Only three sites in the land are mentioned: Shechem (v.6), between Bethel and Ai (v.8), and the Negev (v.9). As Cassuto has suggested, it can hardly be accidental that these are the same three locations visited by Jacob when he returned to Canaan from Haran (chs. 34 – 35).They are, as well, the same sites occupied in the account of the conquest of the land under Joshua.

The Pentateuch does not recount its narrative simply to instruct about ancient history. Rather, it aims to teach religion and heritage, and it uses ancient tradition for this purpose. Already in Genesis 12 we can see this method. Abram comes up out of the north and passes through all the land of Canaan in three journeys. In the first journey he goes to Shechem, where he builds an altar to the Lord, marking the "ideal conquest" of the land and its sanctification to the Lord (12:6 – 7). Then he arrives on the east of Bethel, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. Again he builds an altar and calls on the name of the Lord (12:8). In the third journey he travels to the Negev (12:9), and there, in Hebron, he later

purchases the field of Machpelah (Ge 23).

Jacob returns from the east; his journeys in the land are like those of Abraham. First he goes to Shechem and purchases a section of a field, where he puts his tent and erects an altar to the God of Israel (33:18 – 20). Before he leaves this site, he hides all the idols he has received from Shechem beneath the oak tree planted there (35:4).Then he journeys to Bethel, where he sets up a pillar to the glory of his God (35:14 – 15). Finally he travels to the south, which is the Negev, and comes to Hebron (35:27).

The key points in the journeys of Abraham, then, parallel those of Jacob, and both of these, in turn, parallel the key points in the conquest of the land of Canaan as recounted in the book of Joshua. The first region that they conquer is the cities of Jericho and Ai, and the text uses the same expression as in Genesis 12:8 — east of Bethel, between Bethel and Ai, west of Ai (Jos 7:2, 8:9; cf. also v.12). Immediately after this Joshua builds an altar at Mount Ebal, that is, next to Shechem (Jos 8:30). From there the Israelites spread into two further regions: south of Bethel and Ai (Jos 10) and north of Shechem (Jos 11) — the same three regions we see with Abraham and Jacob.

In Shechem, Joshua commands the Israelites to put away the foreign gods that are in their midst (Jos 24:23), using almost the same words as Jacob did earlier. Joshua erects a large stone under the oak that is in the sanctuary of the Lord (Jos 24:26; cf. Ge 35:4).These parallels demonstrate that the deeds of the fathers prefigure those of their descendants. Their intention is to show that what happened to Abraham also happened to Jacob and then also to his descendants. In other words, the conquest of the land was already accomplished in a symbolic way in the times of the fathers (demonstrated by building of altars and purchasing property). In other words, the Lord has cared for them from the very start and that he will remain trustworthy in the days of their descendants (these last few paragraphs are adapted from EBi, 1:65 – 66).

NOTES

1 It is only from the larger context (i.e., 11:27 – 32) that we can identify מוֹלַדְתְּךָ (*môladt'kā,* *f*Ê, “your people”) with אוּר כַּשְׂדִּים (*'ûr kaśdîm,* “Ur of the Chaldeans”) —

viz., in 11:28 בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתּוֹ (*bᵉereṣ môladtô*, "in the land of his birth") is identified as בְּאוּר כַּשְׂדִּים (*bᵉʾûr kaśdîm*, "in Ur of the Chaldeans"). It is apparent, then, that the author of the wider context intended the *môladtkā* of 12:1 to be understood as *ʾûr kaśdîm*. Thus the reading of Genesis 12:1 in Acts 7:2, in which God called Abraham "before he lived in Haran," follows the sense of the larger context. In Genesis 24:7, 10, אֶרֶץ מוֹלַדְתִּי (*ʾereṣ môladtî*, "native land") is identified as אֲרַם נַהֲרַיִם (*ʾărām nāhᵃrayim*, "Aram Naharaim").

2 The imperative with *waw* — וְהְיֵה בְּרָכָה (*wehyēh bᵉrākâ*, "will be blessed"), following the cohortative וַאֲגַדְּלָה (*waʾᵃgaddᵉlâ*, "and I will make great"), is read as a "consequence which is intended, or in fact an intention" (GKC, par. 110i). Thus, the purpose of God's call is not only that Abraham might become a great nation, but also that he might be a blessing (*bᵉrākâ*).

3 Much discussion (see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward An Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 13;Westermann, *Genesis*, 2:175) has centered on the meaning of the Niphal (וְנִבְרְכוּ, *wᵉnibᵉrkû*," [they] will be blessed"; GK 1385) in v.3 (and 18:18; 28:14), particularly in contrast to the Hithpael (וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ, *wᵉhithābᵉrkû*,"they will be blessed") found elsewhere (22:18; 26:4). There is general agreement that both should have the same meaning, but is the Niphal to be understood in the light of the Hithpael or vice versa?

The usual meaning of the Niphal is passive and the Hithpael is reflexive. If taken as passive, the sense of this clause is, "through you will all the families of the earth be blessed." If reflexive, the sense is that the nations henceforth will bless themselves by evoking the name of Abraham. As Rashi explained it, "A man will say to his son, 'May you be like Abraham.'" Thus if *nibᵉrkû* is passive, there is a broader, more theological sense to the passage. God has a plan of blessing for all nations that is to be effected through the seed of Abraham. If reflexive, Abraham appears to be little more than a reminder of God's blessing.

More recently Westermann, 2:176, who takes *nibᵉrkû*as reflexive, has suggested that in the final analysis there is little difference between the passive and reflexive sense: "When the 'families of the earth' bless themselves 'in Abraham,' that is, wish themselves well by naming Abraham's name (as in Psalm 72:17 and still more clearly in Ge 48:20), it is thus naturally presupposed that they then will also receive a blessing."

Most explanations of *uʿnibrʿkû* share the view that the Niphal is used interchangeably with the Hithpael in the Genesis passages. Thus the forms are read collectively as either passive or reflexive. There is reason to doubt, however, that the two forms are used in Genesis with identical meaning. The Niphal *uʿnibrʿkû* occurs three times (12:3; 18:18; 28:14), which are its only occurrences in the Hebrew Bible. The Hithpael *niṯbārʿkû* occurs twice (22:18; 26:4).There is an important difference in the clauses where these two verbal stems occur. Although each takes an adverbial modifier with the בּ (*b*) preposition, the Niphal forms occur with the pronominal object (e.g., בְּךָ, *bʿkā*, "through you").

(1) 12:3: וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ (*uʿnibrʿkû bʿkā*, "[they] will be blessed through you")

(2) 18:18: וְנִבְרְכוּ בוֹ (*uʿnibrʿkû bô*, "will be blessed through him")

(3) 28:14: וְנִבְרְכוּ בְךָ (*uʿnibrʿkû bʿkā*, "will be blessed through you")

(The antecedent of the pronominal object of the preposition is the individual patriarch who, at that point, is the one addressed. Note that in 28:14, the only occurrence of this promise given to Jacob, the adverbial phrase וּבְזַרְעֶךָ, *ûbʿzarʿekā*, "and your offspring," is added to the end of the clause.)

The Hithpael forms occur with the nominal object, viz., זַרְעֶךָ (*zarʿkā*, "offspring").

(4) 22:18; 26:4: וְהִתְבָּרְכוּ בְזַרְעֶךָ (*uʿhiṯbārʿkû bʿzarʿkā*, "and through your offspring [they] will be blessed")

Such a clear distribution of the two forms (Niphal and Hithpael) cannot be accidental. It leads us to suspect that the alternation of Niphal and Hithpael is purposeful. Is there a feature of either the Niphal or the Hithpael that could explain this distribution? The answer may lie in the "iterative" sense of the Hithpael (R. H. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 1967], 28 – 31). That would explain the Hithpael *hiṯbārʿkû* in 22:18 and 26:4 as extending the promised blessing into the future as an ongoing blessing through the "seed." In 5:22, for example, the Hithpael וַיִּתְהַלֶּךְ (*wayyiṯhalleìk*, "[he] walked"; cf. 6:9: הִתְהַלֶּךְ *hiṯhallek*, "he walked," perfect; 17:1: הִתְהַלֵּךְ *hiṯhalleìk*,

"walk," imperative; 3:8: מִתְהַלֵּךְ, *mithallēk*, "walking," participle) expresses an ongoing walk with God (iterative). Also, if the Hithpael in 3:24 — הַמִּתְהַפֶּכֶת (*hammithappeket*, "flashing back and forth") — expresses a "turning to and fro," that would imply an iterative sense for the stem.

In Genesis 37:34b the Hithpael also has an iterative sense: וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל־בְּנוֹ יָמִים רַבִּים (*wayyiṯʾabbēl ʿal- bᵊnô yāmîm rabbi* "and he lamented over his son many days"). The use of the Hithpael in the expression of the blessing of Abraham is not likely a mere duplication of the Niphal, nor the Niphal a duplication of the Hithpael. Each has its own distinct contribution to make to our understanding of the promise. The Niphal is to be read as a passive, its most likely sense. The Hithpael is iterative and is used to depict the promise with respect to the future "seed" — the blessing will continue (iterative) to be offered to the nations through the "seed" of Abraham.

5 The verbal parallels between Abraham's departure from Ur in ch. 11 and his response to God's call in ch. 12 are striking.

(1) 11:31: "Terah took . . . Abram."

(2) 12:5: lit., "Abram took Sarai."

(3) 11:31b: "together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan."

(4) 12:5b: "and they set out for the land of Canaan."

(5) 11:31b: "they came to Haran."

(6) 12:5b: lit., "and they arrived in the land of Canaan."

The similarities are perhaps designed to play down the distinction between the two events and merge them into one continuous journey.

C. Abraham in Egypt (12:10 – 13:4)

[10]Now there was a famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to
live there for a while because the famine was severe. [11]As he was about to
enter Egypt, he said to his wife Sarai, “I know what a beautiful woman you
are. [12]When the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife.’ Then
they will kill me but will let you live. [13]Say you are my sister, so that I will
be treated well for your sake and my life will be spared because of you.”

[14]When Abram came to Egypt, the Egyptians saw that she was a very
beautiful woman. [15]And when Pharaoh’s officials saw her, they praised her
to Pharaoh, and she was taken into his palace. [16]He treated Abram well for
her sake, and Abram acquired sheep and cattle, male and female donkeys,
menservants and maidservants, and camels.

[17]But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household
because of Abram’s wife Sarai. [18]So Pharaoh summoned Abram. “What
have you done to me?” he said. “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife?
[19]Why did you say, ‘She is my sister,’ so that I took her to be my wife?
Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!” [20]Then Pharaoh gave orders
about Abram to his men, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and
everything he had.

[13:1]So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and
everything he had, and Lot went with him. [2]Abram had become very
wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

[3]From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to
the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier [4]and where
he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

12:10 – 13:4 Verse 10 opens a new episode with a notice that a famine forces Abram to seek refuge in Egypt. Almost as though to justify his incongruous journey to Egypt, this verse emphasizes that the “famine was severe.” The narrative continues to 13:4, where we are returned to the original point of departure in the narrative, that is, to Abram’s worshiping of God at the altar he had built between Bethel and Ai.

A recurring theme can be traced throughout the subsequent narratives in Genesis, one that is first noted in the present story: the threat to God’s promises of 12:1 – 3 (Westermann). Nearly every subsequent episode contains such a threat. The promise of a “seed,” of blessing to “all peoples on earth,” or the gift

of the land is placed in jeopardy by the actions of the central characters of the narrative. Each time the promise appears to be on the brink of nonfulfillment. In the face of such threats, however, God plays a central role in remaining faithful to his word by entering the arena to safeguard his promise — the purpose of this recurring theme. God alone can bring about the divine promise, and the failures of humankind cannot stand in the way.

The account of Abram's "sojourn" in Egypt bears the stamp of having been intentionally shaped to parallel the later account of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ge 41 – Ex 12). Both passages have a similar message. Here, at the beginning of the narratives dealing with Abram and his seed, we find an anticipation of the events that will occur at the end. As with other sections of the book, the parallels are striking:

	Abram		Joseph
Ge 12:10	There was a famine in the land	41:54b	There was a famine in all the other lands
12:11	As he was about to enter Egypt	46:28	When they arrived in the region of Goshen
12:11	He said to his wife Sarai	46:31	Joseph said to his brothers
12:11	I know what . . .	46:31	I will go up and speak to Pharaoh
12:12	When the Egyptians see you, they will say . . .	46:33	When Pharaoh calls you and asks . . .
12:13	Say . . .	46:34a	You should answer . . .
12:13	My life will be spared because of you	46:34b	You will be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen
12:15	When Pharaoh's officers saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh	47:1	Joseph went and told Pharaoh
12:15	She was taken into his palace	47:5 – 6	Pharaoh said . . . "Settle your father and your brothers . . . in the best part of the land."
12:16	And Abram acquired sheep and cattle . . .	47:6	Put them in charge of my own livestock.
			They acquired property and were

		47:27	fruitful and increased greatly
12:17	The LORD inflicted serious dis-eases on Pharaoh	Ex 11:1	I will bring one more plague on Pharaoh
12:18	Pharaoh summoned Abram	Ex 12:31	Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said
12:19	Take her and go	Ex 12:32	Take . . . and go
12:20	They sent him on his way	Ex 12:33	To hurry and leave the country
13:1	Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev	Ex 12:37	The Israel journeyed from Rameses toward Succoth
13:1	Lot went with him	Ex 12:38	Many other people went up with them
13:2	Abram had become very wealthy in livestock,	Ex 12:38	Large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds
	silver and gold	Ex 12:35	silver and gold
13:4	There Abram called on the name of the LORD	Ex 12:47	The Passover

By shaping the account of Abram’s sojourn in Egypt to parallel the events of the Exodus, the author permits the reader to see the implications of God’s past deeds with the chosen people. The past is not allowed to remain in the past. Its lessons are drawn into the future. Behind the pattern stands a faithful, loving God, who will do for the faithful people of today and tomorrow what was done for Abram.

The whole of God’s plan, from beginning to end, is thus contained within the scope of this simple story. In light of these parallels we should also understand the close similarity between the account of Abram’s sojourn in Egypt in ch. 12, the account of his sojourn in Gerar in ch. 20, and the account of Isaac’s sojourn in Gerar in ch. 26. These similarities have long been recognized, though not always appreciated. One must avoid two extremes. We cannot be content merely to reduce the importance of the similarities to evidence of a “common tradition.”

Nor is it enough to attribute the similarities to mere coincidence. It is likely that the similarities are intentional and part of a larger pattern of “parallel narratives” distributed compositionally throughout the Pentateuch.

Within the Joseph narratives, for example, there are noticeable “sets” of parallel dreams, each recounted with marked similarities. Though different in many of their details, each “set” of dreams is related to the same set of circumstances within the narrative (37:5 – 7, 9; 40:5 – 19; 41:17 – 21, 22 – 24). In his interpretation of the Pharaoh’s dreams, Joseph voices the meaning not only lying behind the repetition of the dreams but, apparently, also to all the repetitions and parallels within the Pentateuch as well: “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon” (41:32). Joseph’s words provide the sense lying behind the patterns and repetitions that occur in these narratives. The reason there are repetitions and recurrences of similar narratives is to show that the matter has been firmly decided by God and that God will act quickly to bring about the promise. The interpreter is guided by Joseph’s own words.

NOTE

13:1 The position of the nominal clause וְלוֹט עִמּוֹ (*wᵉlôṭ ʿimmô*, “and Lot went with him”) between the preceding clause and the adverbial הַנֶּגְבָּה (*hannegbâ*,' “to the Negev”) is unusual and shows that the narrative is explicitly setting Lot apart from the family and household of Abraham. The preceding narrative of Abraham’s sojourn in Egypt was silent regarding Lot; thus it is necessary to reinsert him into the narrative. The Samaritan Pentateuch and the LXX have *wᵉlôṭ ʿimmô* already in 12:20, which appears to be an assimilation to 13:1. The expression in v.14 — אַחֲרֵי הִפָּרֶד־לוֹט מֵעִמּוֹ (*ʾaḥᵃrê hippāred-lôṭ mēʿimmô*, “after Lot had parted from him”) — presupposes the presence of *wᵉlôṭ ʿimmô* in v.1.

D. The Lot Narratives (13:5 – 19:38)

1. Abraham and Lot (13:5 – 18)

[5]Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds
and tents. [6]But the land could not support them while they stayed together,
for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together.
[7]And quarreling arose between Abram's herdsmen and the herdsmen of Lot.
The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

[8]So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and
me, or between your herdsmen and mine, for we are brothers. [9]Is not the
whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to
the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

[10]Lot looked up and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan was well
watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt, toward Zoar.
(This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) [11]So Lot
chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east.
The two men parted company: [12]Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while
Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.
[13]Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the
LORD.

[14]The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Lift up your
eyes from where you are and look north and south, east and west. [15]All the
land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. [16]I will make
your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the
dust, then your offspring could be counted. [17]Go, walk through the length
and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

[18]So Abram moved his tents and went to live near the great trees of
Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.

COMMENTARY

5 – 18 The connections of this new section with the preceding ones are transparent. Abraham returns to the place he left when he went to Egypt (v.3). Now he is a wealthy man. In spite of him, God has given him a blessing.

The narrative continues the theme of "struggle" and "separation" (*paìrad*, vv.9, 11, 14) developed in the previous stories (10:32;11:8 – 9; 12:1).At its

conclusion stands a restatement of the divine “promise” to Abram (13:14 – 17). The first statement of the Abrahamic “promise” (12:2 – 3) was preceded by an account of the separation of Abram’s ancestors from the surrounding nations (*paìrad*, 10:32) and Abram from his father’s house (12:1). This second statement of the “promise” is also located in the context of Abram’s separation (*paìrad*) from his closest kin, Lot (13:14). As the story of Lot unfolds in Genesis, we learn that he is the father of the Moabites and Ammonites (19:37 – 38).The final statement of the “promise” to Abraham comes after his demonstration of a willingness to be separated even from his son and heir, Isaac (22:15 – 18).

Abram’s separation from Lot continues the theme of “promise in jeopardy” (see comments on 12:10 – 13:4). In this case Abram himself appears at fault. It is his actions that put the promise in jeopardy. In his attempt to resolve the growing struggle between his shepherds and Lot’s, Abram makes what appears to be a precipitous offer in which he finds himself on the verge of giving away the land promised to him. He says to Lot, “If you go to the left, I’ll go to the right; if you go to the right, I’ll go to the left” (v.9).

The tension Abram’s offer creates in the story is obvious. If he gives the land to Lot, what will become of the divine promise to the “seed” of Abram? His offer appears to leave the fulfillment of the promise not only in jeopardy, but also in the hands of Lot. In spite of the potential threat to the promise, God’s will prevails. Lot chooses to go “east” (*miqqedem*, v.11), and Abram remains in the land (v.12). God’s promise remains secure — in spite of Abram.

In biblical narratives, the author frequently guides the reader through the text by means of subtle foreshadowings of future events. Here Lot’s choice is intentionally linked to its disastrous results — the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot chooses the land because it was “like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt” (v.10) — a positive description within the context of Genesis —but the author adds an additional point: it was like the “garden of the LORD” because it was “before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah” (v.10).

In addition, we are told that the land chosen by Lot is found in the area “toward Zoar.” As the subsequent narrative will show, Zoar is the city to which Lot flees for safety from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:22). These

are small but significant signals to what lies ahead. Already in his choice of a land “to the east” that is “like the garden of the LORD” and lying close to “Zoar,” we can sense the final outcome of Lot’s choice. This sense of the final outcome also comes in vv.12b – 13: “Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.”This same information is restated at the beginning of ch. 19.

In 10:32 the author closed the account of the dispersion of the nations with the following statement: “From these the nations spread out [*pārad*, i.e., ‘separated’] over the earth after the flood.” Then the narrative of the dispersion of Babylon opens with the account of the people of the land “moving eastward” (*nāsa‘ miqqedem*) into the “plain [*biq‘â*] in Shinar,” where they set out to build the city of Babylon (11:1 – 2). Now Lot is said to have “set out toward the east” (*nāsa‘ miqqedem*, 13:11) from the land into “the cities of the plain [*kikkar*]” of the Jordan when he “parts” (*pārad*) from Abram.

Following the “separation” of the nations at Babylon, the narrative resumes with Abram traveling throughout the land of Canaan, receiving it as a promise, and then building an altar in response to God’s promise (12:1 – 9). After Lot “separates” to Sodom, Abram travels throughout the land of Canaan and receives it a second time as a promise. There he builds an altar in response (vv.14 – 18). Lot, then, is an important link connecting the author’s treatment of the two cities, Babylon and Sodom. The close parallels between the two narratives suggest that he intended both cities to tell the same story. As in the case of parallels and repetitions throughout the book, the double account of God’s destruction of the “city in the east” drives home the point that God’s judgment of the unfaithful is certain and imminent (cf. 41:32).

REFLECTION

What lies behind this story about Abram and Lot is that God’s promises will prevail. Even the plans and choices of the nations will ultimately fit into God’s will for them. Nothing can stand in the way of God’s promise, not even Abram. The viewpoint reflected in this narrative is found many times in the prophetic literature. In Isaiah 45 the prophet depicts the rise of the Persian king Cyrus as a

work of God's own hand. In the eye of Isaiah the prophet, all the plans and military campaigns of Cyrus had only one purpose — that God's people might return from exile: "He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free" (Isa 45:13).

2. Abraham and the Nations (14:1 – 24)

[1]At this time Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar,
Kedorlaomer king of Elam and Tidal king of Goiim [2]went to war against
Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah,
Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). [3]All these
latter kings joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (the Salt Sea). [4]For twelve
years they had been subject to Kedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they
rebelled.

[5]In the fourteenth year, Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him went
out and defeated the Rephaites in Ashteroth Karnaim, the Zuzites in Ham,
the Emites in Shaveh Kiriathaim [6]and the Horites in the hill country of Seir,
as far as El Paran near the desert. [7]Then they turned back and went to En
Mishpat (that is, Kadesh), and they conquered the whole territory of the
Amalekites, as well as the Amorites who were living in Hazazon Tamar.

[8]Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the
king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) marched out and drew
up their battle lines in the Valley of Siddim [9]against Kedorlaomer king of
Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of
Ellasar — four kings against five. [10]Now the Valley of Siddim was full of
tar pits, and when the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fl ed, some of the men
fell into them and the rest fl ed to the hills. [11]The four kings seized all the
goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food; then they went away.
[12]They also carried off Abram's nephew Lot and his possessions, since he
was living in Sodom.

[13]One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew.
Now Abram was living near the great trees of Mamre the Amorite, a
brother of Eshcol and Aner, all of whom were allied with Abram. [14]When
Abram heard that his relative had been taken captive, he called out the 318
trained men born in his household and went in pursuit as far as Dan.
[15]During the night Abram divided his men to attack them and he routed

them, pursuing them as far as Hobah, north of Damascus. [16]He recovered all the goods and brought back his relative Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the other people.

[17]After Abram returned from defeating Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the Valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley).

[18]Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, [19]and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

[20]And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand."

Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

[21]The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself."

[22]But Abram said to the king of Sodom,"I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, and have taken an oath [23]that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the thong of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, 'I made Abram rich.' [24]I will accept nothing but what my men have eaten and the share that belongs to the men who went with me — to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre. Let them have their share."

COMMENTARY

1 – 11 At first glance the ties between chs. 13 and 14 seem meager. With respect to both time and place, the two narratives seem only distantly related. Somewhat abruptly the narrative begins in the time frame marked as "in the days of Amraphel" (v.1; NIV, "At this time Amraphel"), with no point of reference to the time of the preceding chapter. Just as abruptly, the location of the narrative moves from Abram's tent in Hebron (13:18) to that of an event of international importance — the wars of the four kings (14:1 – 11).

There are several indications within the narrative, however, that suggest the author intended ch. 14 to be read closely with what precedes. In 14:12 the focus of the account of the war between nations is reduced to the scope of ch. 13 by recounting that Lot was captured during the sacking of Sodom. Immediately

following the report of Lot's capture, the narrative returns to the scene of 13:18, with Abram dwelling at the "great trees of Mamre" in Hebron (14:13b). At this point Abram is brought into the center of the account of the battle with the four kings and, somewhat surprisingly, is capable of marshalling his forces to defeat the kings (vv.14 – 17). With the mention of "Mamre" at the end of the account (v.24), the reader is returned to the scene at the close of ch. 13.

In putting these two narratives together in this way, the author allows an event of international importance to sweep past Abram's tent in Hebron and thus to involve him in an event that will show on an enormous scale the implications of Abram's faith, yet without losing its simple and "everyday" character. "Yahweh" (i.e., "the LORD"), the God Abram worshiped at his altar in Hebron (13:18), is the "Creator of heaven and earth" (14:22), who delivers the four kings of the east into Abram's hands. Abram, who asks nothing and wants nothing from the kings of this world (vv.22 – 23), is the only one who proves able to dwell peacefully in the land. As 12:3 has forecast, those who join with him (v.13b) enjoy his blessing (v.24b); those who separate from him, such as Lot (13:12), suffer the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah (14:11 – 12).

Another feature of ch. 14 shows clearly the author's intent to link this chapter with the themes of the preceding narratives. At the outset of the account of the war of the four kings, the reader is reminded that the events of ch. 14 "happened in the days of Amraphel, king of Shinar" (lit. trans.). Shinar has already been clearly and consciously identified by the author as Babylon (10:10; 11:2, 9). He has deliberately arranged the opening of this narrative so that the king of Shinar's name comes first, thus aligning the narrative with the theme of "Babylon" introduced in 10:10 and 11:2.

The author's intention can be seen in the deliberate placement of the king of Shinar's name first in the narrative. Note how the list of kings in v.1 is different from the lists of these four kings throughout the remainder of the chapter (Kedorlaomer, the king of Elam, is always first, vv.4 – 5, 9, 17). In v.9, where the list of the kings is given, Kedorlaomer begins the list and Amraphel is third. When the sequence of the names in both lists is compared, it can be seen that Kedorlaomer is followed by Tidal in the lists, and Amraphel is followed by Arioch; thus the break in the sequence of the names comes only at Amraphel's name.

14:9 Kedorlaomer, Tidal, Amraphel, Arioch
14:1 Amraphel, Arioch, Kedorlaomer, Tidal

If the sequence in v.9 is the original one, as is suggested by the fact that elsewhere in the lists Kedorlaomer always appears first (as simply "Kedorlaomer," v.4, or "Kedorlaomer and the kings allied with him," vv.5, 17), then at the beginning of the narrative the author has apparently broken the list into two sections, putting the section beginning with Amraphel first and the other section second.

What immediately strikes the reader in this account of the conquest of Canaan by the four kings is that little information is given about the actual battles, while the account is overladen with geographical and political details. The author is more interested in the geographical extent of the warfare than in the actual course of the battles. In other words, the events recounted are global in scope and end in the disgraceful defeat of the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, who are completely routed (vv.10 – 11).

12 At this point, the perspective of the narrative changes markedly. The reader's field of vision is directed from the global scope of the war with the four eastern kings to the sudden change in the fate of Lot. Lot, who departed from Abram to pitch his tent in Sodom, is taken captive along with the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the midst of the harried description of the deteriorating course of events, the reader is reminded of the ultimate cause of Lot's unfortunate fate: he has been living in Sodom. Thus again the narrative is brought into the larger context of the blessing in the land (12:1 – 3; 13:14 – 17) and the fate of all who separate themselves from Abram.

Lot's fate is a lesson — or rather, the first stage in a lesson — that will bring him still further in need of the intercession of Abraham (18:23 – 32). Twice by means of Abraham Lot's welfare is restored: first here in the war with Babylon, and then later (chs. 18 – 19) in the destruction of Sodom. Here Abraham and his band of 318 men rescue Lot. Later Abraham's intercession (18:23 – 32; 19:29) produces Lot's rescue. The picture of Abraham that emerges from these narratives is the same as that given voice in 20:7: "he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live."

13 – 16 The focus of the narrative returns to the scene at the close of ch. 13.

Abram is dwelling with his three friends at Hebron, strangely unaffected by the events recorded in the previous narrative. In this brief scene, strikingly similar to Job 1:17, Abraham is able to muster a select army, defeat the four kings, and return Lot with the rest of the captives.

17 – 20 After his return from battle, Abram is met by two kings in the "Valley of Shaveh" (or "the Valley of the King"). Some have suggested that the present shape of this narrative is disheveled and in disarray because of the insertion of the section on Melchizedek into the middle of the section dealing with the king of Sodom (vv.18 – 20). It is true that Melchizedek appears in the narrative out of nowhere and just as quickly is gone, not to be encountered again or subsequently explained. But the structure of the narrative is not unusual. (The Hebrew construction is a chiastic coordination with the WAYYIQTOL [wayyēṣē'] of yāṣā' [v.17] followed by the QATAL [hôṣî'] of yāṣā' [v.18] and the word order of predicate – subject [v.17] followed by subject – predicate [v.18]; cf. Andersen, 123ff.)

The insertion of this encounter with Melchizedek (vv.18 – 20) into the section dealing with the king of Sodom is done in such a way as to suggest that it is to be read as simultaneous to the encounter with the king of Sodom. (The pattern W + X + QATAL [root A], when it occurs after the main clause with the same root, e.g., WAYYIQTOL [root A], depicts simultaneous action.) Thus a parallel action is implied between Abram's response to the king of Salem and his response to the king of Sodom. Such expression is intended to show a contrast between his responses to these two kings — to the one it is positive, to the other, negative.

Lying behind Abram's responses to each king is the contrast between the offer of the king of Salem and that of the king of Sodom. The king of Salem brings "bread and wine" as a priestly act (v.18) and acknowledges that it was the "God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth," who delivered the adversaries into Abram's hand (v.19). In other words, the perspective of the king of Salem is precisely that of the author of the Pentateuch, who has also acknowledged at the start of the work that the God who delivered Israel from the hand of the Egyptians (Ex 20:2) is the Creator of heaven and earth (Ge 1:1). Abram's response to the king of Salem, then, is an appropriate recognition of the validity of Melchizedek's offer as well as of his priesthood: Abram pays a tithe (v.20; see Nu 18:21).

21 – 24 The offer of the king of Sodom is different. He offers to give Abram all the "goods" (*hor'kuš*) recovered in the battle (v.21). Abram's response shows how the author views this gesture. Abram will have nothing to do with an offer of reward from the king of Sodom. As his solemn speech shows, Abram's reward will not come from the kings of this world but from "the LORD . . . the Creator of heaven and earth" (v.22). Any "goods" or "possessions" he is to have will come from Yahweh, as the following chapter show (e.g., 15:1, 14b).

In a number of points, the events of ch. 14 reflect the same concerns of Deuteronomy 20:1 – 15, the instructions concerning carrying out wars with foreign nations. Abram's actions are described in ways that echo the code of conduct for warfare against "cities that are at a distance from you and do not belong to the nations nearby" (Dt 20:15). Abram does not hesitate to go into battle against what appears to be an army much greater than his (cf. Dt 20:1). That this is not a minor raiding party is suggested by the fact that the confrontation is described as four kings against five. Kings normally do not go out in a raiding party.

Thus the author informs us that Abram took with him only 318 men, a number that brings to mind Gideon's 300 men in Judges 7:6. He goes into battle specifically with only the "trained men born in his household" (v.14). The Hebrew expression used here for "trained" (*lᵉmûkāyw*) is not found elsewhere in the Bible, nor is its meaning clear within the context of ancient history and customs. But the use of this word provides another link with Deuteronomy 20:5, which says that one who goes into battle should only be someone who has already "dedicated" (*ḥānak*) his house. Since within the Pentateuch the verb *ḥānak* occurs only in this passage of Deuteronomy, a link between the two texts seems likely.

Though he rejected the offer of a reward from the king of Sodom, Abram lays claim rightfully to own that which his young men have eaten (v.24). In Deuteronomy 20:14b it is explicitly stated that those who go into war with nations far off may "eat" (NIV, "use"; viz., to "devour," i.e., "to confiscate [for themselves]") of the spoils taken in battle. Abram also recognizes that his three friends (Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre) have their own rightful share in the spoil (v.24), which corresponds to the provisions of Deuteronomy 20:14. But Abram flatly rejects the offer to take from the possessions of the king of Sodom (v.23), as is prescribed in Deuteronomy 20:17 for the spoils of those nations who live within the boundaries of the land of inheritance.

Along these same lines it should be noted that in Deuteronomy 20:2 the "priest" is assigned the role of reminding the people that "the LORD your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Dt 20:4; cf. v.13,"When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand"). In much the same way Abram is met by Melchizedek, a "priest" (v.18) of the Most High God, who proclaims to him that it is the "God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand" (v.20).

In the light of such similarities it appears that the author intends to show that Abram is living a life in harmony with God's will even though he lived long before the revelation at Sinai. Abram is one who pictures God's law as written on his heart. He obeys the law, even though the law has not yet been given. Such an understanding of his life is not foreign to the author of Genesis. Indeed, one of the last statements made about Abraham in Genesis is that he kept God's "commands [miṣwōtay], ... decrees [ḥuqqôtay] and . . . laws [tôrōtāy]"(26:5). These terms are well known from Deuteronomy (e.g., Dt 11:1; 26:17), where they are the stock vocabulary for describing the keeping of the Torah revealed at Sinai.

The author, in other words, shows that Abraham, as a man of faith, "kept the law." He did not have the law written out on tablets of stone; nevertheless he kept it. In this respect the picture of Abraham that emerges from chs. 14 and 26 is much like that of the "new covenant" promise in Jeremiah 31:33, where God promises to write the Torah on the hearts of the covenantal people so that they will obey it from the heart. This is the picture of Abraham that later emerges as central in the NT writers' portrayal of life under the new covenant (e.g., Ro 4; Gal 3).

In later biblical texts, Melchizedek comes to personify a new kind of priesthood that surpasses the priesthood of Aaron under the Sinaitic covenant. The prophet Zechariah looked to a future time when the king in Jerusalem would be not only a descendant of David but also a priest (Zec 6:11 – 13). Zechariah's hope was grounded both in the infamous failure of the Aaronic priesthood (see, e.g., Jer 2:8; 5:31) and his own faith in God's promise to David (2Sa 7:16). God had promised to David a descendant who would rule eternally on his throne. It is clear from Zechariah 6:12 – 13 that he understood God's promises to David to include a royal priesthood, much like that of Melchizedek's in Genesis 14.

The Chronicler also saw in God's royal promise to David an additional promise of a priestly descendant who would care for God's house, the temple, and rule justly over his people. According to 1 Chronicles 17:14, God not only promised David a royal son but also said, "I will set him over my house [the temple] and my kingdom forever." In David's own words, this meant that God had made an eternal covenant with his descendants, promising that one of them could reign eternally both as a king and as a "priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:4). The writer of Hebrews draws heavily on these OT texts in expositing the royal priesthood of Jesus (Heb 7).

NOTE

2 – 11 The numerous explanatory comments in this short narrative — "that is, Zoar," v.2; "the Salt Sea," v.3; "near the desert," v.6; "that is, Kadesh," v.7; "who were living in Hazezon Tamar," v.7b — suggest that at the time of the composition of Genesis, this account already contained many obscure — or at least not readily identifiable — elements. However, the fact that "Bela" is twice identified as צֹעַר (צֹעַר, "Zoar," vv.2, 8), whereas "the Valley of Siddim" is identified only once (v.3), though it is mentioned three times (vv.3, 8, 10), also suggests that the additional information was not always intended merely to fill a lack of knowledge but also sought to draw a clear connection between the events of this chapter and those of later narratives. In ch. 19 צֹעַר is again important (19:22), whereas "the Valley of Siddim" plays no role after ch. 14.

3. Abraham and the Covenant (15:1 – 21)

a. Abraham's vision (15:1 – 4)

[1]After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision:
"Do not be afraid, Abram.
I am your shield, your very great reward. "
[2]But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I

remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.”

4Then the word of the LORD came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.”

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 Abraham is explicitly called a “prophet” (*nābî'*) in 20:7. In ch. 15 the author goes to considerable lengths to cast him in that role. The central subject of the chapter deals with the announcement of events that lie far in the future (vv.13 – 16); thus it is important to the author that Abram’s credentials as a prophet be clearly established and defended.

As is characteristic of the later prophetic literature, God’s address to Abram is introduced in a style typical of the prophetic literature: “the word of the LORD came to Abram” (vv.1, 4; cf. Jer 34:12). Like the seer Balaam (Nu 24:4, 16), Abram sees the word of the Lord “in a vision” (*bamarᵉʾâh*). The word *marʾeh* occurs only here and in Numbers 24 (the prophecies of Balaam) in the Pentateuch. This introduction is intended to show that the events recorded in ch. 15 are seen by Abram in a vision. Thus, like prophetic visions elsewhere in Scripture, there may be more than a little symbolic value to the events. This is especially likely in the visual display that Abram saw in v.17.

It may also be significant that here, *for the first time*, it is recounted that Abram speaks to God. Until this point in Genesis, God has spoken to Abram, and Abram has obeyed silently without speaking to God in return. Elsewhere Abram speaks to God only on rare occasions (v.8; 17:18; 18:23 – 33; 22:11). Chapter 15 is thus largely unique. In the vision of ch. 15, Abram not only replies to God’s speaking a word of promise but he also goes on to raise the question of how the promise will be fulfilled. He raises so many questions in this chapter that the author seems compelled to remind the reader of his unwavering faith (v.6).

Abram’s questions provide the necessary backdrop for the central issue of the chapter: God’s *delay* in fulfilling his promises. This issue is the same as that

faced by the prophet Jeremiah in his day. God's people, who should have been enjoying the promised blessing, find themselves instead about to enter captivity in Babylon. God's promises appear to have come to naught: "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer 25:11).

In Jeremiah's warning of impending judgment, there is a promise of ultimate blessing. The time of exile in a foreign land has a limit: "When the seventy years are fulfilled," the Lord told Jeremiah, "I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians ['Chaldeans,' NIV mg.], for their guilt" (Jer 25:12). Thus the faithful in exile can, like Daniel, wait in the hope that in spite of the present affliction in Babylon, God will remain faithful to his promise: "I, Daniel, understood from the Scriptures, according to the word of the LORD given to Jeremiah the prophet, that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years. So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes" (Da 9:2 – 3).

A limit to God's judgment is set: seventy years. In much the same way, Genesis 15 addresses an audience who awaits the fulfillment of the promises to the fathers but who can see no present evidence of the fulfillment. They are like those whom Isaiah calls on to "hope in the LORD" (Isa 40:31) and who Habakkuk says will ultimately "live" through the present affliction only because they have been made "righteous by their faith" (cf. Hab 2:4).

As the author of Genesis 15 has shown, Abram's predicament is not too far from that of later generations of God's people. Abram too must wait in faith for the fulfillment of the promise, being counted righteous in his faith (v.6) but realizing that the promise is also meant for a far off, future generation (vv.15 – 16). "All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (Heb 11:13). So the message to the reader is to stand fast. When people ask, "Where is this 'coming' he promised?" remember: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2Pe 3:4, 9).

The statement, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward," (v.1b) raises a number of questions. What had Abram to be afraid of?

What “reward” did God have in mind? Were the military events in ch. 14 still posing a threat to Abram? Since ch. 15 opens by making a major break with the preceding chapter (“after this”; cf. 22:1; 39:7; 40:1), God’s first words to Abram are probably not to be understood within the immediate context of ch. 14. We are left, then, with the subject matter of ch. 15 itself to determine the sense of these first words to Abram. From that perspective Abram may have begun to fear for the final outcome of God’s promise to make his “offspring like the dust of the earth” in number (13:16).

The questions Abram raises betray the fact that such a fear lies behind God’s first words of comfort. Abram asks, “What can you give me since I remain childless?” (v.2). Then he turns his question into an accusation: “You have given me no children” (v.3). Finally, as he is again reminded that his “offspring” (v.5) will be greater than one can number and that he will inherit the land, he asks, “How can I know that I will gain possession of it?” (v.8). Not only do his questions betray the fear that lies within him, but also the Lord’s continued assurances point in the same direction: “A son coming from your own body will be your heir” (v.4).

In this narrative, then, Abram is portrayed as one who has reason to fear that God’s promises will not be fulfilled. From all appearances, he has little to give him hope that God will remain faithful to his word. Abram is still childless, and all his possessions one day will be again in the hands of Eliezer from “Damascus” (v.2).

The mention of “Damascus” (v.2) draws a connection to Abram’s victory near “Damascus” in ch. 14, tying the themes behind the events of ch. 15 to those of ch. 14.Yet the fulfillment of God’s promises lies not in the strength Abram exhibited in the defeat of the four kings at Damascus (14:15), but in his “faith” (*he·emin* v.6; NIV, “[Abram] believed”) in the promised “offspring” (singular).

At the close of the narrative, Abram is given a vision of the future, which is to be a source of comfort in the face of the apparently unfulfilled promises of God. The events in the vision fit exactly those that happen to Abram’s descendants in Exodus 1 – 12. The importance of the vision lies not so much in the assurances it may have given Abram in his own day, but rather in the assurances it gives to the reader of Genesis and Exodus. From reading the rest of the Pentateuch, the

reader knows that Abram's vision will be fulfilled in the days of Moses.

Thus, within the narrative of Genesis and the Pentateuch, the vision and its fulfillment confirm Abram's prophetic words. We as readers know that he is given a true vision. What he sees in the vision comes to pass and is recorded in the Pentateuch itself. Thus to the readers who know that the vision is true, Abram is proven to be a true prophet according to the test in Deuteronomy 18:22: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message that the LORD has not spoken." Abram, like Jeremiah (Jer 27 – 29), is a true prophet even though he speaks of exile and not blessing. But also like Jeremiah (chs. 30 – 31), Abraham's vision looks beyond the coming exile to the time when God will restore his people and "punish" (dān) their oppressors: The Lord says, "I will punish [dān] the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions" (15:14).

It is in the light of this vision, then, that God's first words to Abram in ch. 15 are to be understood. With the same words Jeremiah comforts those awaiting exile in his day: "Do not fear, O Jacob my servant; do not be dismayed, O Israel . . . . I will surely save you out of a distant place, your descendants from the land of their exile" (Jer 30:10).

NOTES

1 There are several features of the picture of Abram in this chapter that distinguish it from the picture of him found thus far in the patriarchal narratives:

1. For the first time Abram answers (speaks to) the Lord when the Lord speaks to him (vv.2, 8).

2. The introductory phrase, "the word of the LORD came to Abram/him" (vv.1, 4), is unique.

3. The Lord appears to Abraham in a vision (v.1).

4. Abraham “believed” (v.6).

5. When God speaks to Abraham, God identifies himself (v.7).

6. Explicit future events are revealed to Abraham (vv.13 – 16).

2 The meaning of מֶשֶׁק (*mešeq*; NIV, “inherit”) is unknown (see KB, s.v.). The fact that the LXX has merely transliterated it (Μασεκ; “Masek”) suggests that already at that early date the meaning of the term had fallen out of use. The phrase הוּא דַּמֶּשֶׂק (*hûʾ dammešeq*; NIV, “of Damascus”) appears to be an explanation of the obscure phrase בֶּן מֶשֶׁק בֵּיתִי (*ben-mešeq bêtî*; lit., “son of my estate”) in 15:2b.The motive behind this explanation is apparently to link Abram’s words to the events of the preceding chapter by means of the wordplay between *mešeq* and *dammeseaq* in 14:15.

b. Abraham’s descendants and his faith (15:5 – 6)

> [5]He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars — if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him,“So shall your offspring be.”
> [6]Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

COMMENTARY

5 The appeal to the number of the stars of “the heavens” looks back to Abram’s words in 14:22, where his hope for reward was based solely on the “Creator of heaven and earth.” If Yahweh is the Creator of the great multitude of the stars in heaven, it follows that he is able to give Abram an equal number of descendants (“offspring”). Thus, once again, God’s faithfulness in the past becomes the basis for Abram’s trust in the future.

The comparison of the number of Abraham’s descendants to that of the stars of the heavens occurs several times in the Pentateuch: twice as the promise was reiterated to Isaac (22:17; 26:4), and then again by Moses at a crucial moment when God is on the verge of destroying the whole nation (Ex 32:13). In

Deuteronomy 1:10 there is an allusion to this promise in reference to the great multitude that came out of Egypt.

The appeal to the great number of the "seed of Abraham" shows that along with the promise of an individual royal "seed" (see comments on 12:1 – 5), there is also a collective aspect to many of the promises in Genesis. The collective side of the promise of a "seed of Abraham" looks forward to the people and the nation that will come from Abraham. In doing so it provides an essential identity to the individual "seed of Abraham." That "seed" is not one from among the nations in general but one from among the "people of Abraham," whose history the Pentateuch and the OT as a whole record.

6 The syntax of v.6 suggests that it is to be read as a comment by the narrator, who interrupts the narration to remind the reader of a central idea. God is about to enter a "covenant" with Abram that will lie at the base of all God's future dealings with him and his seed (vv.7 – 21).

Verse 6 opens the scene by setting the record straight: Abram had believed in Yahweh and had been counted as righteous. The "covenant" will not make Abram "righteous"; rather, it is on account of his "faith" that he is counted righteous. Only then can Abram enter into a covenant with God. The precise location and use of the terminology of "faith" in ch. 15 is in line with its use in the remainder of the Pentateuch. At key moments in the book, the author returns to the notion of "faith" and identifies it as the decisive factor in God's dealings with Abraham and his descendants (e.g., Ex 4:5, 31; 14:31; 19:9; cf. H.-C. Schmitt, "Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie," *VT* 2 [1982]: 170ff.).

NOTE

6 The syntax of וְהֶאֱמִן בַּיהוָה (*wĕhe'emin bayhwh*, "[Abram] believed the LORD"; W + QATAL + X; cf. 2:6b, 10b, 24 [2x]; 15:6a; 21:25a; 29:3 [4x]; 30:41a [2x], 42b; 34:5b; 37:3b; 38:5b, 9b; 47:22b) suggests that this is the narrator's comment to the reader and is not to be understood as an event within the framework of the other events. The narrator "updates," as it were, the reader's understanding of the events by telling of Abram's faith.

c. Abraham’s future and his covenant (15:7 – 21)

7 He also said to him,“I am the LORD, who brought you out of Ur of the
Chaldeans to give you this land to take possession of it.”
8 But Abram said, “O Sovereign LORD, how can I know that I will gain
possession of it?”
9 So the LORD said to him,“Bring me a heifer, a goat and a ram, each
three years old, along with a dove and a young pigeon.”
10 Abram brought all these to him, cut them in two and arranged the
halves opposite each other; the birds, however, he did not cut in half.
11 Then birds of prey came down on the carcasses, but Abram drove them
away.
12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and
dreadful darkness came over him. 13 Then the LORD said to him, “Know
for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their
own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I
will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come
out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace
and be buried at a good old age. 16 In the fourth generation your descendants
will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full
measure.”
17 When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot with a
blazing torch appeared and passed between the pieces. 18 On that day the
LORD made a covenant with Abram and said,“To your descendants I give
this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates — 19 the
land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, 20 Hittites, Perizzites,
Rephaites, 21 Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and Jebusites.”

COMMENTARY

7 – 16 These verses, as v.18 shows, recount the establishment of a covenant (*brît*) between God and Abram. Thus it is fitting that in several respects the account should foreshadow the making of the covenant at Sinai. The opening statement,

“I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans” (v.7), anticipates a virtually identical opening statement for the Sinaitic covenant (Ex 20:2): “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt.” The expression “Ur of the Chaldeans” is a reference back to 11:28 and 31 and grounds the present covenant in a past act of divine salvation from “Babylon,” just as Exodus 20:2 grounds the Sinaitic covenant in an act of divine salvation from Egypt.

The coming of God’s presence in the fire and darkness of Sinai (Ex 19:18; 20:18; Dt 4:11) is foreshadowed in Abram’s fiery vision in this chapter (vv.12, 17). In the Lord’s words to Abram (vv.13 – 16), a connection between his covenant and the Sinaitic covenant is established by a reference to the four hundred years of bondage for Abram’s descendants and their subsequent “exodus” (יְצָאוּ, “and afterward they will come out,” v.14).

17 The act of dividing the animals and walking through the parts appears to have been a form of ancient contractual agreement. Little is known of the specific custom from written accounts from the ancient world, though commentators frequently point to some possible parallels. Two notable examples are (1) Jeremiah 34:18 — “The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces” — and (2) a treaty between Ashurnirari V of Assyria and Mati’ilu of Arpad —“If Mati’ilu sins against (this) treaty made under oath by the gods, then, just as this spring lamb, brought from its fold, will not return to its fold . . . alas, Mati’ilu . . . will not return to his country” (*ANET*, 532). In neither of these examples is there an extended parallel to Genesis 15, though the terminology of the Jeremiah passage is similar to it.

18a While the meaning of many of the details remains a mystery, the writer of Genesis gives the sense of the custom: “On that day the LORD *made a covenant* with Abram.” The narrative may be intentionally ambivalent about the meaning of the details since it is only the formal nature of the contract that it wishes to stress. It may also be concerned to avoid any notion of self-imprecation on God’s part. Wenham, 332, notes that the animals mentioned are animals acceptable for sacrifice, and in that light he interprets the events within the context of the OT rituals in Leviticus and later events in the Torah. The animals, he suggests, represent Israel or its priestly leaders. The birds of prey represent the nations Abram symbolically defends Israel against — perhaps Egypt — and God’s

deliverance of Israel. In that case, God's walking through the parts may represent the divine presence with his people.

In support of such an interpretation is the observation that the introduction explicitly identifies the chapter as a "vision." That leads us to expect the possibility of symbolism. However, such a one-to-one correlation of the details of the narrative and specific future events does not find immediate support from within the narrative or from other, similar narratives in Genesis. At the most the narrative offers a kind of general foreshadowing of the events that lie in the future for Abram's descendants — it is an adumbration that is prefaced by a foreboding sense of darkness: "a thick and dreadful darkness came over him" (v.12).

The sudden and solitary image of the birds of prey that Abram must drive away (v.11) give a fleeting glimpse of the impending doom that awaits his seed, but it also may point to God's protective care of his promises —"Then birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away." The imagery is similar to the words of Christ in Mt 24:28: "Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather." In both contexts the imagery of the birds of prey surrounding the carcass is followed by a reference to the darkening of the sun (Ge 15:12; Mt 24:29) and the promise of future redemption (Ge 15:14; Mt 24:30).

It is probably best to resist too much speculation on the sense of the individual parts of Abraham's vision, in spite of the suggestive ambiguity of its symbols. Ultimately we must rest on the interpretation given within the text by the author: "Know for certain that your seed will sojourn in another's land and they will serve them four hundred years. . . . After that they will come out with great possessions" (vv.13 – 14).

18b – 21 The author draws the land back into the narrative by concluding with a description of its boundaries. The borders of the land appear to coincide with those of the garden of Eden (cf. 2:10 – 14) and seem to represent what we might call today in an ideal sense, "the known world."

The preceding considerations lead to the conclusion that the author has intentionally sought to draw the reader's attention to the events at Sinai in the

depiction of the covenant with Abraham. If we ask why the author seeks to move in that direction, the answer perhaps lies in the larger purpose of the book. It is part of the overall strategy of Genesis to show that what God did at Sinai was part of a larger plan that had already been put into action with the patriarchs. The Exodus and Sinaitic covenants serve as reminders not only of God's power and grace, but also of God's ultimate faithfulness to the divine plans and promises.

NOTE

19 Three names are included in this list that do not occur elsewhere in similar lists (e.g., Dt 7:1): הַקְּנִי (*haqqênî*, "the Kenites"), הַקְּנִזִּי (*haqqᵉnizzî*, "the Kenizzites"), and הַקַּדְמֹנִי (*haqqadmōnî*, "the Kadmonites"). It may be coincidental that each of these names begins with the identical letter ק (*q*). However, since the total of this list is ten, the author probably intends it to fit the pattern of lists with ten names (chs. 5; 11).

4. Hagar (16:1 – 16)

a. Abraham and Hagar (16:1 – 6)

[1]Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; [2]so she said to Abram,"The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. [3]So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian maidservant Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. [4]He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. [5]Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

[6]"Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you

think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fl ed from her.

COMMENTARY

1 – 6 Ch. 16 contains several allusions to Genesis 3:6. These allusions are clearly intentional and help shape the narrative and provide its primary connection to the larger themes of the book: faith and obedience. A central parallel between Genesis 3 and 16 is Sarai's plan to produce the "promised" son for Abram. This story is intended to replicate Eve's attempt to find wisdom apart from God (3:6). Eve desired the fruit she believed would make her wise, so she took the fruit, gave it to her husband, and he ate. Similarly, Sarai desires a son from whom she hopes "her house will be built." So she takes Hagar and gives her to her husband, Abram. Sarai's words ("perhaps I [my house?] will be built from him") point to the promised "seed" of Abraham in the earlier narratives. God had not given him a son, and the only one to posess his inheritance will be "a son of [his] house."

The main storyline (marked by WAYYIQTOL verbal clauses) and key expressions in 16:2 – 3 are closely parallel to Genesis 3 (see the table below). As is true throughout these narratives, the similarity of the shape and structure is a way of linking them to similar thematic structures elsewhere. By bringing the events of Hagar and Abram into the larger context of Genesis 3, the author extends the sense of the story beyond Abram and Hagar as individuals and ties their actions to the themes of the book as a whole: trust in God alone to fulfill the promises.

16:2a: *wattōʾmer śāray ʾel* ("so she [Sarai] said to")	3:2: *wattōʾmer hāʾiššâ ʾel* ("The woman said to")
16:2b: *wayyišmaʿ ʾabrām lᵉqôl śārāy* ("Abram agreed to what Sarai said")	3:17: *šāmaʿtā lᵉqôl ʾištekā* ("you listened to your wife")
16:3a: *wattiqqaḥ śāray* ("Sarai ... took")	3:6a: *wattiqqaḥ mippiryô* ("she took some")
16:3b: *wattittēn ʾōtâ lᵉʾabrām ʾîšâ* ("and [she] gave her to her husband [Abram]")	3:6b: *wattittēn gam-lᵉʾîšâ* ("she also gave some to her husband")

This first section of the narrative about Hagar focuses on Sarai's plan to overcome her barrenness and have a child. Sarai's plan to assure Abram the promised child was no doubt acceptable within the social customs of their day, but from the author's vantage point the plan is an example of human effort in the face of a call for faith. Eve's plan was an attempt to find wisdom apart from God

by eating the forbidden fruit; Sarai's plan is an attempt to achieve the promised blessing by leaving God out of the picture. The author's disapproval of Sarai's plan is suggested by casting the plan along lines similar to Eve's plan in Genesis 3. Sarai's plan, like Eve's, is an attempt to achieve God's blessing on her own, without God's help.

The positioning of this narrative immediately after the account of the covenant affirming the promise of a child (15:4) is surely intentional. Sarai's plan clearly looks as though it were intended to head off the divine promise by supplying it with a human solution. Hence the story follows along the same line of meaning of the narratives that precede it. It demonstrates the fultility of human effort and its ultimate failure to fulfill the divine promise. Sarai's plan, though successful, does not meet with divine approval (17:15 – 19). The same focus on the failure of human plans and schemes is found in earlier narratives (11:1 – 9; 12:10 – 20; 13:1 – 12; 14:21 – 24).

b. Hagar and Ishmael (16:7 – 12)

7 The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was
the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of
Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"
"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.
9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and
submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that
they will be too numerous to count."
11 The angel of the LORD also said to her:
"You are now with child and you will have a son.
You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery.
12 He will be a wild donkey of a man;
his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and
he will live in hostility toward all his brothers."

COMMENTARY

7 – 12 The location of the narrative shifts from the household of Abram to the

desert. Hagar leaves Sarah and flees to the “desert” (v.7). There she stays until instructed by the angel to return to her mistress, Sarai.

While Hagar is in the desert, the angel of the Lord comes to her by a well of water. The identification of the spring as the “spring that is beside the road to Shur” (v.7) suggests to the reader what might otherwise only be suspected: Hagar is returning to Egypt (see 25:18).This is one of several “woman at the well” scenes in the Bible (e.g., Ge 24:11; 29:2; Ex 2:15; Jn 4).The meaning of such scenes may lie in the fact that a well is a primary source of water in a dry region and is thus readily identifiable as a source of blessing (cf. Jn 4:7 – 10). In addition, the fact that a well is open to all and that anyone may drink from it suggests the universal nature of the blessings spoken there.

The angel says to Hagar:“I will so increase [,*arbeh*] your descendants that they will be too numerous to count” (v.10). His words are similar to the “blessing” to be received by Abram (17:2: “I will increase” [,*arbeh*]) and Ishmael (17:20: “I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers [*hirbêtî*]”). The author’s purpose in so linking these blessings is to connect them to the primeval blessing promised to all humanity: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the land” (1:28).The focus of the Abrahamic blessing is on “all peoples on earth” (12:3).

The associations between ch. 16 and ch. 3 continue in this section of the narrative. Just as after the fall the Lord sought out Adam and Eve with a question (3:9),“Where are you?” so the angel of the Lord finds Hagar in the desert and greets her with a question (16:8): “Where have you come from, and where are you going?” As in 3:15, the angel of the Lord offers a blessing to Hagar (16:10 – 12). The child to be born will be called “Ishmael” (*yišmāʿēl*), because “the LORD has heard” (*kî-šāmaʿ* her distress. Hagar has been afflicted by Sarai (v.6), and the Lord has heard her cry (v.11).

Hagar’s “blessing” draws on a wordplay between “wild donkey” (*pereʾ*) and “Paran” (*pāʾrān*; cf. 21:21), the biblical location of the tribes of Ishmael. A “wild donkey” describes “Ishmael as a free nomad” (BDB, 825). The expression “his hand will be against everyone and everyone’s hand against him” (v.12) is linked to a parallel description of Ishmael in 21:21, “he lived in the Desert of Paran.”The fact that “he shall dwell upon the face of all his brothers” (lit. trans.

of v.12b) means, “he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen” (RSV; cf. NIV mg.), that is, he shall dwell in the desert as a nomad.

c. Hagar and God (16:13 – 16)

13She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.” 14That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.

15So Hagar bore Abram a son, and Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son she had borne. 16Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

COMMENTARY

13 – 16 The final section of this narrative consists of Hagar’s naming of God and the birth of Ishmael. These two events go together in that the birth of the child is the confirmation of the name Hagar gives to God: “the God of seeing” (see Note).

Note

13 אֵל רֳאִי (*ʾēl rŏʾî*) is not “the God who sees me,” as the LXX and the NIV render the words; “the God who sees me” would be אֵל רֹאִי (*ʾēl rōʾî*). Keil suggests that the participle would be רֹאֲנִי (*rōʾănî*, as in Isa 47:10) rather than רֹאִי. However, רֹאִי is a QUTL noun from רָאָה “to see”).The explanation given the name ,רָאִיתִי (*rāʾîtî*, in the second half of the verse calls on the similar sounding perfect רָאִיתִי (*rāʾîtî*, “I saw”) and the participle רֹאִי. The participle is also the basis of the name given to the well in v.14: לַחַי רֹאִי (*laḥay rōʾî*, “Lahai Roi”). The words רָאִיתִי אַחֲרֵי (*rāʾîtî ʾaḥărê*, “I have seen the back of,” NIV mg.) in Hagar’s explanation of רֹאִי (*rōʾî*, “the One who sees me”) may be related to רָאִיתָ אֶת אֲחֹרָי (*rāʾîtā ʾet-ʾăḥōrāy*,“you will see my back”) in Exodus 33:23.

5. Abraham, Sarah, and Ishmael (17:1 – 27)

a. Abraham's Covenant (17:1 – 2)

[1]When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. [2]I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers."

COMMENTARY

1a The report of Abram's age serves as a connecting link to the preceding narrative of Ishmael's birth. The close of ch. 16 indicates that he was eighty-six years old when Ishmael was born. By the beginning of ch. 17,Abram is ninety-nine years old. His age comes up again at the conclusion of the chapter: Abraham is ninety-nine years old when he is circumcised and Ishmael is thirteen (vv.24 – 27). The age of Abraham provides a temporal framework for the events of the chapter and a link to what precedes.

After ch. 17, the next note concerning Abram's age comes in the account of the birth of Isaac (21:5), where Abraham is one hundred years old. Between these two points the text contains a diverse collection of narratives with little close attention to their chronological coherence. Nevertheless, the notices regarding the age of Abram/Abraham provide the chronological boundaries for the events of the narratives. They suggest these events happened in the year before the birth of Isaac.

1b – 2 Chapter 17 is one of a small group of narratives in which the author explicitly states that the "LORD appeared" (wayyēʾ; cf. 12:7; 18:1; 26:2, 24; 35:9). Unlike the similar statement in ch. 18 (wayyēʾ, v.1), where the author devotes special attention to the actual nature of the Lord's appearance, here the interest of the author is in what the Lord says, not in the nature of the appearance itself.

The Lord's first speech to Abram is brief and serves mainly as a summary introduction to the second speech, which by comparison is quite long. As a

summary, however, the first speech establishes the interpretive boundaries or context for the rest of the chapter. Most important, it establishes the fact that the events of the chapter represent the making of a covenant between the Lord and Abram. The subject of the covenant is the promise of descendants.

The author immediately identifies God as "the LORD" (*yhwh*, v.1b), the God of the Sinaitic covenant (Ex 3:15). Within the narrative, however, God identifies himself to Abram as "God Almighty" (*ʾēl šaddāy*). In so doing, the author has removed all doubt regarding the faith of Abram at this stage in the narrative. He worships the covenantal God, "the LORD" (*yhwh*), but he knows him as "God Almighty." (This is consistent with Exodus 6:3: "I appeared [*wəʾēʾ*] to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty (*ʾēl šaddāy*), but by my name the LORD [*yhwh*, 'Yahweh'] I did not make myself known to them.")

After the self-identification, the Lord gives a brief synopsis of the covenant about to be established with Abram. The Lord stresses Abram's obligation: "Walk before me and you will be blameless" (lit. trans.). The imperative (*wehyēh*), since it is dependent on a preceding imperative (*hithallēk*, "walk"), does not have the sense of a command (as the NIV's "be") but of a "consequence" of an initial condition (GKC, 325): "If you walk before me, you will be blameless."

The Lord also stresses the divine promise inherent in the covenant: "I . . . will greatly increase your numbers" (v.2). The choice of words in v.2 —"I will make my covenant" (RSV) — raises a question of the proper relationship of ch. 17 to the preceding narratives. Had not God already "made" (*kārat*) a covenant with Abraham in 15:18? Why is he establishing a covenant with Abram a second time? Several solutions to this problem have been proposed. The simplest answer lies in seeing the two covenants as two distinct parts of God's covenant with Abraham — the first one stressing the promise of the land (15:18 – 21) and the second stressing the promise of a great abundance of descendants (17:2).

b. Abraham's Response and Sign (17:3 – 16)

> [3]Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, [4]"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. [5]No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a

father of many nations. [6]I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations
of you, and kings will come from you. [7]I will establish my covenant as an
everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you
for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your
descendants after you. [8]The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an
alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants
after you; and I will be their God."

[9]Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant,
you and your descendants after you for the generations to come. [10]This is
my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are
to keep: Every male among you shall be circumcised. [11]You are to undergo
circumcision, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and you.
[12]For the generations to come every male among you who is eight days old
must be circumcised, including those born in your household or bought
with money from a foreigner — those who are not your offspring.
[13]Whether born in your household or bought with your money, they must be
circumcised. My covenant in your flesh is to be an everlasting covenant.
[14]Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will
be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

[15]God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer
to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. [16]I will bless her and will surely
give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of
nations; kings of peoples will come from her."

COMMENTARY

3a The report of Abram's response to the Lord's words is brief. He "fell facedown" (*wayyippōl…ʿal-pānāyu*). This is a sign of deep respect. The significance of this response can be seen in the similarities between it and the account of his response to the Lord's second word (v.17). He not only "fell face-down" (*wayyippōl…ʿal-pānāyu*) put he also "laughed" (*wayyiṣḥāq*). Thus, when Abram hears *that* God will greatly increase his descendants, he responds with respect and submission. When he hears *how* God will carry out his plan (through his wife Sarah), his respect spills over into laughter. Abram's "laughter" (*yiṣḥāq*) is linked to the announcement of the birth of "Isaac" (*yiṣḥaq*, 21:4) by means of an obvious wordplay: Isaac's name means "laughter" (*yiṣḥāq*). The notion of "laughter" (*yiṣḥāq*)

plays an important role in the compositional strategy of the next several chapters (see comment on v.17).

3b – 16 The second divine speech to Abraham (who is called Abraham for the first time in v.5) is divided into three sections (vv.3b – 8, 9 – 14, 15 – 16), each marked by the reintroduction of the clause,"and God said" (*wayʿdabbēr ʾittô ʾlōhîm*, v.3b; *wayyōʾmer ʾlōhîm*, vv.9, 15). Each section deals respectively with one of the parties of the covenant (the Lord, Abram, and Sarai), each of whom is specifically named or identified at the beginning of the section: the Lord ("As for me [*ʾnî*]," v.4a), Abram ("As for you [*wʾʾattâ*]," v.9a), and Sarai ("As for Sarai your wife [*śāray ʾištʿkā*]," v.15a). The substance of each section of the covenant is memorialized by a specific sign within that section: the change of Abram's name in the first section (v.5), the circumcision of all males of the family in the second section (vv.10 – 14), and the change of Sarai's name in the third section (v.15).

God's part of the covenant (vv.3b – 8) consists of two promises: abundant descendants (vv.4 – 6) and eternal faithfulness (vv.7 – 8). As the Abrahamic narratives have thus far stressed, the descendants of Abraham who belong to this covenant owe their existence to God alone: "You will be a father of many nations." As understood in the NT, they will be "children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (Jn 1:13). The promise of abundant descendants is then memorialized in the change of Abram's name to "Abraham" (*ʾabrāhām*, v.5). The name "Abram," which means "a great father," is changed to "Abraham," which is interpreted to mean "father of many nations" (*ʾab hʿmôn gôyim*, v.4b).

The word "fruitful" (*hiprētî ʾōtʿkā*, "I will make you fruitful") and "multiply" (*rbh*) in v.2 (*wʾʾarbeh ʾōtʿkā*," "increase your numbers") recalls the original divine blessing in 1:28. To all humanity (Adam), God says, "Be fruitful [*pʿrû*] and increase in number [*ûrʿbû*]; fill the earth." The blessing is reiterated in 9:1: "Be fruitful [*pʿrû*] and increase in number [*ûrʿbû*] and fill the earth." The author's purpose is to show that God's covenant with Abraham is the chosen means through which his original blessing will again be channeled to all humankind.

An important element of this promise is emphasized in v.6b: "kings will come forth from you." The mention of kings among the descendants of Abraham not only anticipates the subsequent history of Abraham's descendants as recorded in

the historical books (e.g., Samuel and Kings), but more important, it also provides a link between the general promise of blessing through the seed of Abraham and the author's subsequent focus on that blessing in terms of the royal house of Judah (Ge 49:8 – 12; Nu 24:7 – 9).

The notion that the blessing will come through a royal "seed" is not new to the book's general argument. We have already seen Melchizedek, the king from Jerusalem (Salem), bless Abraham (cf. 14:18 – 19). That anticipates a promise similar to the Davidic covenant (2Sa 7:12 – 16). What is here developed for the first time is the notion that this king will be of the "seed" of Abraham. At work here is the same theological planning we see lying behind the structure of the genealogy of Matthew 1: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham."

Abraham's part in the covenant is his obedience: "You must keep my covenant" (*ʾet -bᵉrîṯî tišmōr*, v.9). What this means is immediately explained: "This is my covenant [*bᵉrîṯî*] . . . you are to keep[*tišmᵉrû*].... Every male among you shall be circumcised" (v.10). To keep (*šmr*) the covenant is reduced to a single command: you must practice circumcision. To "break" (*prr*, cf. v.14b) the covenant is to remain "uncircumcised" (*ʿārēl zākār*, v.14a). Lest the reader conclude that the whole of the covenant is simply the rite of circumcision, the author has included the words, "it will be the sign of the covenant" (*uᵉhāyâ ʾôṯ bᵉrîṯ*, v.11b). It is not the whole covenant; rather, it is a sign of one's belonging to the covenant.

Sarai's part in the covenant is to bear the offspring of Abraham. She will be the mother of nations, and "kings of peoples will come from her" (v.16b). In her old age, she will be the one through whom God demonstrates that he alone can fulfill the covenanted promise. As with Abraham, Sarai also receives a new name, which will be a sign of her role in the covenant. She will no longer be called "Sarai" (*śārāy*) but "Sarah" (*śārâ*,v.15). Unlike with the name "Abraham," the author does not explain the meaning of Sarah's new name (v.5b). He may take it for granted that the reader understands v.16 ("Kings of peoples will come from her") as an explanation of her new name, for "Sarah" means "princess." The reader can easily recognize why Sarah will now be called "princess."

NOTES

5 The wordplay between אַבְרָהָם (*ʾabrāhām*, "Abraham") and אַב הֲמוֹן גּוֹיִם (*ʾab-hᵉmôn gôyim*, "a father of many nations") illustrates the nature of the paronomasia found throughout these narratives. It is not intended to be a strict etymological derivation but a simple play on the similar sounds of the two words.

15 Notice the chiastic alliteration in שָׂרַי כִּי שָׂרָה שְׁמָהּ (*śᵉrnâ šānāy kî śārâ śᵉrnâ*, "[her name] Sarai; her name will be Sarah"). The two names *śārāy* and *śārâ* appear to be two forms of the same name. The change to *śārâ* however, highlights the link between this name and the word for "princess" (*śārâ*).

c. Abraham's Response (17:17 – 18)

> [17]Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" [18]And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

COMMENTARY

17 – 18 Abraham's response to God's promise is not what the reader may have expected: "Abraham fell facedown; he laughed" (*wayyiṣḥāq*, v.17a). In light of the author's portrayal of Abraham thus far in Genesis (e.g., 15:6), it does not seem likely that his laughter is intended to point to a lack of faith —though the text leaves something of that impression. Without commenting directly on Abraham's reaction to God's promise, the author allows Abraham's own words in v.17b to uncover the motivation behind his laughter: "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?" Abraham's laughter is an expression of his utter amazement: "How can this happen?"

Some have suggested that Abraham's laughter is an expression of his joy at hearing the good news of a promised son. The early translations of Genesis rendered v.17, "And Abraham fell on his face and rejoiced." Note what Jesus said in John 8:56: "Your father Abraham *rejoiced* to see my day; and he saw *it*,

and was glad."

In 18:12, where Sarah also responds to God's promise with laughter, the author shows that her laughter is met with divine disapproval: "Then the LORD said, 'Why did Sarah laugh?' " The absence of a rebuke of Abraham's laughter suggests that Abraham's laughter does not so much reflect a lack of faith on his part as it does a limitation of his faith. Abraham is not one whose faith in God has reached full maturity. He is one whose faith must still be pushed beyond its present limits. His faith must grow if he is to continue to put his trust in God's promise. One clear purpose of the author's including the note about Abraham's laughter can be seen in that the Hebrew expression "he laughed" (*wayyiṣḥāq*, v.17) foreshadows the name "Isaac" (*yiṣḥāq*).

The irony of Abraham's response is evident. Even in his surprising response of laughter in the face of God's promise, Abraham's laughter becomes a verbal sign marking the ultimate fulfillment of the promise in Isaac. Throughout the remainder of the narratives surrounding the birth of Isaac (*yiṣḥāq*), a key word within each major section is "laughter" (*ṣāḥaq*).

Sarah "laughed" (*wayyiṣḥāq*).

Lot's sons-in-law laughed (*kimṣaḥēq*, 19:14;

NIV, "[thought he was] joking").

All who hear of Sarah's giving birth to Isaac will "laugh" (*yiṣḥāq*, 21:6).

The son of Hagar laughed (*mᵉṣaḥēq*, 21:9b;

NIV,"was mocking") at Isaac Finally, Isaac's own failure to trust in God (26:7) is uncovered when the Philistine king sees him "laughing" (*mᵉṣaḥēq* , 26:8b; NIV, "caressing") with Rebekah.

Thus for the author of the book, both the power of God and the limitations of human faith are embodied in that most ambiguous of human acts, laughter.

For the first time the name “Abraham,” rather than “Abram,” is used as the subject of a verb: “Abraham fell facedown; he laughed” (v.17; cf. v.3).The author’s irony can be seen in the fact that Abraham is laughing at the very thing his new name is intended to mark: “You will be the father of many nations” (v.4b).

d. Abraham’s Offspring (17:19 – 22)

COMMENTARY

> [19]Then God said, “Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him. [20]And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation. [21]But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear to you by this time next year.” [22]When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went up from him.

19 – 22 The content of the third divine speech extends the covenant to include Isaac, who will be born of Sarah. Thus Isaac will not be one of the anonymous “offspring” who receive the benefits of the covenant. He is here brought to the level of a participant in the original covenant: “I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him” (v.19b). The descendants of Abraham who are heirs of the covenant are those who come through Sarah. In this respect God’s words to Abraham concerning Isaac in ch. 17 (“I will establish my covenant with him,” v.19b) already anticipates the reiteration of these words in the covenant with Isaac in 26:3b: “I . . . will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham.”

In this final speech the author of Genesis is careful to show that Ishmael and his descendants must also live under God’s blessing themselves (v.20). In blessing Ishmael, God reiterates the original divine blessing of all humankind in 1:28 (“I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase

his numbers," 17:20a) and the blessing of Abraham in 12:2 ("I will make him into a great nation," v.20b). Just as the "offspring" of Isaac will form a great nation of twelve tribes (49:1 – 27), so the "offspring" of Ishmael, under God's blessing, will form a great nation of twelve rulers (17:20b). The list of these twelve rulers is given in 25:13 – 15.

e. Circumcision (17:23 – 27)

> [23]On that very day Abraham took his son Ishmael and all those born in his household or bought with his money, every male in his household, and circumcised them, as God told him. [24]Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, [25]and his son Ishmael was thirteen; [26]Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised on that same day. [27]And every male in Abraham's household, including those born in his household or bought from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

COMMENTARY

23 Abraham's final response shows that he obeys the covenant as commanded in v.9; that is, he circumcises all male members of his household "as God told him." This final remark about Abraham's obedience carries the reader back to the beginning of the narrative, where the injunction was given: "Walk before me and be blameless" (v.1).

This portrait of an obedient Abraham is reminiscent of the picture of Noah, who also "walked with God" and was "blameless" (6:9). In light of the sparsity of these terms in Genesis, the author most likely expects an association to be made between these two great men based on the close recurrence of both terms. "Blameless" (tāmîm) occurs in Genesis only in these two texts; "walk before God" (hithallēk) occurs more frequently but in carefully selected contexts (Enoch, 5:22, 24; Noah, 6:9; Abram, 17:1; 24:40; Isaac, 48:15). Thus Abraham and Noah are presented as examples of those who live in obedience to the covenant and are therefore "blameless" before God (v.23b; cf. 6:22; 7:5, 9, 16).

24 – 27 The mention of the ages of Abraham and Ishmael marks an *inclusio* to

the narrative, which opened with the age of Abraham and, by implication, the age of Ishmael. The final word at the close restates Abraham's obedient response to the covenant. The chiastic structure of vv.26 – 27 adds a formality to the conclusion and also stresses the major topic of the chapter: Abraham obeys God's will in carrying out his covenantal obligations.

6. Three Visitors (18:1 – 33)

a. Abraham's hospitality (18:1 – 8)

[1]The LORD appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. [2]Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground.

[3]He said,"If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. [4]Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. [5]Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way — now that you have come to your servant."

"Very well," they answered, "do as you say."

[6]So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of fine fl our and knead it and bake some bread."

[7]Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. 8He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree.

COMMENTARY

1a Chapter 18 is a complex narrative showing clear signs of theological reflection. Its central issues (the announcement of the birth of Isaac and the question of the fate of the righteous amid divine judgment) are also treated in chs. 17 (announcement of Isaac's birth) and 19 (fate of the righteous amid divine

judgment). The author's treatment of these two themes pushes beyond a mere reporting of the events to develop them into a theological lesson. The narrative begins, as in ch. 17, with the author's report that "the LORD [*yhwh*] appeared [*wayyēʾ*] to Abraham."

The importance of this comment should not be overlooked, for it helps clarify one of the most puzzling features of the narrative, namely, who are the three men who visit Abraham and what is their mission? The author leaves no doubt that in some (albeit unexplained) way the three men represented the Lord. This *appearance* of the Lord to Abraham provides an important context to guide our reading of the chapter.

The mention of the "great trees of Mamre" reestablishes the location of Abraham during these events. When his location is last noted, he moved his tents near the "trees of Mamre" (13:18). Apparently Abraham is still there since settling near "Mamre at Hebron"; thus at the beginning of ch. 18 that narrator updates the reader on Abraham's whereabouts. Perhaps the purpose is to reestablish the scene at the close of ch. 13, where Abraham was dwelling in the land God had promised to him and Lot had turned away and "pitched his tents near Sodom" (13:12). At that time the reader was apprised of the condition of the people of Sodom: "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD" (13:13).

The Hebrew text does not have "to Abraham" in v.1, as the NIV has it, but rather "to him" (*ʾēlāyw*) The antecedent of "him" is "Abraham" in 17:26. The identification of Abraham within ch. 18 does not occur until v.6. Thus the opening section of ch. 18 is closely bound with the end of ch. 17 and the account of the circumcision of Abraham and his household. The final verse (v.33) — which recounts that after the Lord had finished speaking, "he left" (*wayyēlek*) — shows that the whole chapter is to be understood within the context of the Lord's appearance to Abraham (cf. also 17:1 and 22; 35:9 and 13

1b – 8 The narrative about the arrival of three men at Abraham's tent is complicated by several uncertainties. First, the relationship between the three men and the appearance of the Lord (18:1a) is not explicit. Second, there appears to be a conscious shift in the verbal forms between v.3 and vv.4 – 9. In v.3 the verbs and pronouns are singular, whereas in vv.4 – 9 the forms are plural. Third,

there is uncertainty about the ultimate value of the vowel points in the MT, which in v.3 have rendered Abraham's greeting (ʾădōnāy, "my lord/Lord"; cf. NIV mg.) as an address to God: "O Lord" (by lengthening the final vowel to a *qames*. [ʾădōnāy,] rather than a *patah*. [ʾădōnāy, as in 19:2a]).

Finally, what is the relationship between the uncertainties just raised in ch. 18 and their apparent counterparts in ch. 19, where, for example, the relationship between the "two angels" (or "messengers," *hammalʾākîm* 19:1a) and the Lord (*yhwh*) remains unexplained (e.g., the two "men" [19:12] tell Lot *they* will destroy Sodom [19:13], but the text states that "the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah" [19:24])? The verbs and pronouns in Lot's greeting are all plural (19:2); at the end of the story the same sort of unevenness found in ch. 18 reappears (e.g., 19:17: "as soon as they [plural] had brought them out, one of them said [singular]"; or 19:18: "Lot said to them [plural] . . . Your [singular] servant"). Also, unlike 18:3b, the Masoretes' vocalization of "my lords" (NIV) in 19:2 reflects an address to persons other than God (ʾădōnāy, rather than ,ʾădōnāy,), whereas when the same persons are addressed in 19:18, the Masoretic form of "my lords" (NIV) is again the form used only to address God (ʾădōnāy,).

Such features leave the impression that the text of these chapters has come down to us in a highly irregular and uneven form, leading many to suppose that more than one version of the story lies behind the present narrative. Gunkel, 194, for example, concluded that the "interchange of the singular and plural forms does not follow a recognizable principle but is rather completely unmotivated." Nevertheless, it can confidently be said that the text as it presently stands does evoke a singular and coherent interpretation if it is read with an eye for the importance of every detail and apparent irregularity.

As the following comments will demonstrate, the apparent irregularities in the text are the result of the author's careful balancing of two central theological positions with respect to the divine presence and power. These irregularities are best understood as the result of a conscious attempt to stress both the theological relevance of the promise of God's *presence* and of God's transcendent, sovereign *power*. The author appears to be struggling to remain faithful to the central theological constraints of the task of reconciling two equally essential views of God.

The close similarities between the account of Abraham's visit by "three men" (18:1 – 3) and that of Lot's visit by the "two angels/men" (19:1 – 2) suggest that the narratives should be explored further for clues regarding their interrelationship. The scene in ch. 18 opens with Abraham seated "at the entrance to his tent" (*yōšēb petaḥ-hāʾōhel*, v.1), just as in the opening of ch. 19 Lot is found "sitting in the gateway of [Sodom]" (*yošēb bᵉšaʿar-sᵉdōm*, v.1). Second, when Abraham "saw" (*wayyarʾ*) the men, he ran "to meet them" (*liqrāʾtām*), "bowed low to the ground" (*wayyištaḥû ʾārṣâ*), and said, "O Lord, if now ..." (*ʾᵃdōnāy ʾim-nāʾ*; NIV, "If . . . my lord," 18:2 – 3). Likewise, when Lot "saw" (*wayyarʾ*) the angels/men, he got up "to meet them" (*liqrāʾtām*), "bowed down with his face to the ground" (*wayyištaḥû ʾappayim ʾārṣâ*), and said, "Behold now, O lords . . ." (*hinneh nāʾ-ʾᵃdōnay*; NIV, "My lords," 19:1 – 2).

The effect of these striking similarities serves to highlight the one primary difference between them, namely, the way the visitors are greeted. Abraham addresses them as "Lord" (*ʾᵃdōnāy*) and appropriately used the singular to address all three men in v.3 (see above). Lot, however, addresses the visitors as "lords" (*ʾᵃdōnāy*) and thus used the plural to address the two angels/men. The most immediately apparent explanation of this contrast is that the author wants us to see that Abraham, who has just entered the covenant (ch. 17), recognizes the Lord when he appears to him, whereas Lot, who is living in Sodom, does not recognize the Lord. The lives of the two men continue to offer a contrast.

We should note further that in the phrase "the LORD appeared to Abraham" (18:1), the reader has been prepared for Abraham's greeting of the three men as "the Lord." In the case of Lot's greeting of the men as simply "my lords," the reader is also in a position to judge Lot's response. In 18:21 the reader knows that the Lord is on his way to Sodom; thus the most likely inference is that when the two angels/men arrive, they represent the Lord's visit (this is confirmed in 19:13b). As the narrative progresses, Lot comes to the point of recognizing his visitors as emissaries of the Lord. Note that the last time he addresses these two angels/men (19:18), he speaks to "them [note the plural *ʾălêhem*] . . . 'Lord' " (*ʾᵃdōnāy*) NIV,"my lords," but cf. mg.); appropriately, as with Abraham, he addresses them both with a singular. In keeping with Lot's recognition of the identity of the two angels/men, in 19:19 Lot states his requests to them in the same words as Abraham addressed his three visitors (cf. 19:19 with 18:3b).

The interchange between the singular and plural verbs and pronouns in 18:3 (where the singular is used) and 18:4 – 16 (where the plural is used) seems to be

one of the ways the author uses to clarify a crucial point in the narrative, namely, the nature of the divine-human relationship. The biblical God earlier made himself known intimately and concretely to his people by "speaking in a vision" (*bammaḥ^azeh*, 15:1) or through an "angel" (*malʾāk*, 16:7) who speaks for him. These narratives pose no difficulty to the reader of the Pentateuch, who is familiar with the strict prohibition against the presentation of God in any physical form (see Dt 4:15, "You saw no form of any kind the day the LORD spoke to you at Horeb"). But passages in which it is expressly stated that God actually "appeared" (*ʾădōnāy*), to someone (12:7; 17:1; 18:1) raise difficult questions. How can God "appear" to people without their seeing of his form? How can God "appear" and yet say, "My face must not be seen" (Ex 33:23)?

Such questions, I suggest, lie behind the apparent unevenness of the narrative in ch. 18. By carefully identifying and distinguishing the characters in the narrative through the singular and plural verbal forms, the author is able to show that the Lord's appearing to Abraham and the visit of the three men are one and the same event. God appeared to Abraham, but not "face to face" in a physical form. Rather, the author has so arranged the singular and plural forms that the three men always represent and can be identified with God's presence but yet at the same time remain clearly distinct from God. Note the following:

1. The author identifies the scene as a visit from the Lord ("And the LORD appeared to him," 18:1).
2. Abraham sees the three men, greets them, and addresses them as the Lord (*ʾădōnāy*), using the singular throughout v.3.
3. Once established as a visit from the Lord, Abraham addresses the three men in the plural; and the author follows his lead by using the plural in the description of the three men in vv.4 – 9 ("and they answered," vv.5b, 9a).
4. At v.10, without reidentifying the speaker, the author picks up the narrative again with the singular "and he said." (The NIV has correctly added "the LORD" in its translation, but note that the Hebrew text does not reidentify the subject.) By not doing so, the author has minimized the break in this switch from the plural to the singular.

In other words, the three men represent the physical "appearance" of the Lord to Abraham. In much the same way the burning bush of Exodus 3:2 – 3 was a physical representation of God's presence, yet it was not actually the physical presence of God. In such a way the presence of God among his people was

assured without also creating the impression that God may have a physical form.

The identity of “he” in v.10 (*wayyō’mer*) is explicitly recovered in vv.13 – 14, where the author does supply “the LORD” as the speaking subject (*wayyō’mer yhwh*), and his words are the same as those of v.10: “I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son” (v.14b). Thus the “he” of v.10 can be none other than the Lord.

This same interweaving of the three men and the Lord continues throughout the rest of the narrative. In v.16 the men make their way toward Sodom, and Abraham accompanies them; but in v.17 it is the Lord who speaks (by thinking aloud, vv.17 – 19, and then addressing Abraham, vv.20 – 21). But as he finishes speaking, the men (*hā’ănāšîm*) depart from Abraham to go toward Sodom (v.22); and the Lord remains with Abraham, departing finally in v.33 (*wayyēlek yhwh*). Thus the narrative teaches that the Lord can speak with Abraham with or without the men but appears (*wayyērā’*, v.1) to Abraham in the form of the three men (v.2).

In a similar way the “two angels” (*šᵊnê hammalᵓākîm*) of 19:1 (later called simply “the men,” e.g., v.10) are addressed with the plural at the beginning of the narrative because Lot does not recognize their true identity as emissaries of the Lord. But after he learns who they are and who has sent them, he addresses “them as “the Lord” (*ᵓᵃdōnāy*, v.18b; cf. NIV mg.; see comments above).

The plural pronoun in 19:18a along with the plural verbal forms in 19:16 make the singular form of the MT in 19:18b difficult. The plural of the LXX, Peshitta, and Vulgate are likely the translators’ attempts to smooth out the difficulty of the singular in light of the plurals in v.16 and v.18a. In v.21 also the identity of the “he” in (*wayyō’mer*, “he said”) is concealed by the author to smooth over (but not eliminate) the break caused by the change from plural to singular. As in 18:13, the “he” in 19:21 is finally identified as “the LORD” in 19:24, some distance from the switch to the singular, so as not to disturb further the already difficult break caused by the shift to the singular. The reader, however, has already been given advance notice that the “two angels/men” in ch. 19 are the Lord in that in 18:21 the Lord said (*wayyō’mer*, v.20a), “I will go down [*’ēr’dâ-nā’*] and see [*uᵓᵓer’eh*] . . . the outcry that has reached me.” When Lot fails to see this, the reader is given an advance insight into Lot’s own state of awareness of the Lord’s presence.

b. The promise of a son (18:9 – 15)

> [9]"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.
> "There, in the tent," he said.
> [10]Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Note

3 אֲדֹנָי (*ʾădōnāy*, "Lord") with the lengthened final dipthong is used by the MT to refer only to God, as is shown by the fact that the Masoretes marked *ʾădōnāy* in this verse as "holy" קֹדֶשׁ, *qōdeš*; see S. Baer, *Liber Genesis* [Lipsiae: Bernahardi Tauchnitz, 1869], 20). Several Masoretic MSS read *yhwh* in place of *ʾădōnāy* in this verse.

> Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. [11]Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. [12]So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"
> [13]Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' [14]Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son."
> [15]Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."
> But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

COMMENTARY

9 – 11 Although the announcement of the birth of a son is made to Abraham, the focus of the narrative is clearly on Sarah's response. Once again, in her laughter (*wattiṣḥāq*, "she laughed," v.12), the name of the son (*yiṣḥāq*, "Isaac") is foreshadowed. But the significance of Sarah's laughter goes beyond that. Her laughter becomes the occasion to make an important theological statement within the narrative, namely, that what the Lord was about to do to fulfill his

promise to Abraham was a matter “too wonderful” (*hāyippālē*, v.14; NIV, “too hard”) even for his own people to imagine.

Verses 9 – 10 set the stage for the brief but intricate narrative that follows. The three men are inquiring about Sarah, but they speak only to Abraham. Sarah remains “off camera” through most of the narrative, though the reader is kept abreast of her thoughts and motives as she listens to the conversation. Only in v.15b is she addressed directly.

As background to Sarah’s response, the author inserts an explanation in v.11. Abraham and Sarah are too old to have children. Sarah, as all women her age, is no longer physically capable of even conceiving a child. The structure of the Hebrew sentence suggests that the latter statement (“Sarah was past the age of childbearing”) is a restatement of the sense of the first one (see Anderson, 46 – 47). In such a statement one may detect an attempt to ensure a harmony between this passage and 25:1 – 4, where after Sarah’s death, Abraham takes another wife, who bears him sons.Thus, the primary obstacle to the fulfillment of the promise is Sarah’s old age (cf. also v.12, where she puts her old age first and then that of Abraham). Finally note also Sarah’s thoughts in v.13, which the Lord rephrases as, “Will I really have a child, now that I am old?” — with no mention made of Abraham’s old age.

These verses bring the promise to the brink of failure, pushing the obstacle of old age far beyond previous levels. Sarah is barren (11:30; 16:1) and Abraham is old. These obstacles in themselves are great enough to demonstrate that the promise, when fulfilled, comes from God alone. But the author takes the reader one step further. Sarah is even past the physical age of being able to bear children. For her to have a child is not simply unlikely, it is impossible (*hāyippālē*, v.14; NIV, “too hard”)!

12 – 15 The key to this short passage lies in the Lord’s question to Abraham about Sarah’s laughter. The subtle shifts in the wording of Sarah’s thoughts suggest that her thoughts are being interpreted as they are being restated. First, the Lord restates Sarah’s ambiguous statement — “After I am worn out . . . will I now have this pleasure?” (v.12) — as simply, “Will I really have a child?” (v.13).Then the Lord takes Sarah’s statement about her husband —“my master is old” (v.12) — and reshapes it into a statement about herself: “now that I am old”

(v.13). Finally, the Lord goes beyond Sarah's actual words to their intent: "Is anything too hard for the LORD?" (v.14a). The underlying issue in the narrative is brought to the surface in these questions. They demonstrate the physical impossibility of the fulfillment of the promise through Sarah.

Once the obstacle of the physical impossibility of Sarah's giving birth is established, the Lord repeats his promise to Abraham: "I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son" (v.14b). At this point Sarah, who has only been silently "listening at the entrance to the tent" (v.10), enters the conversation with a terse reply: "I did not laugh" (v.15a).The author quickly dismisses her response as a lie and goes on to explain that "she was afraid" (v.15). This brief narrative, then, concludes with the Lord's reiteration of what the reader by now certainly knows to be true, namely, that Sarah has, in fact, laughed.

In the course of this brief but important narrative, the reader has come to a new level of understanding of the promise of a son and its potential fulfillment. The promise is beyond physical possibility. No one knows this better than Sarah herself, and through the course of the narrative the author has artfully and delicately revealed the most intimate knowledge about herself to the reader. Having made that point, the author immediately brings the narrative to a close and moves on to a new section of the story.

c. Sodom in the balance (18:16 – 22)

16 When the men got up to leave, they looked down toward Sodom, and
Abraham walked along with them to see them on their way. 17 Then the
LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? 18 Abraham
will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will
be blessed through him. 19 For I have chosen him, so that he will direct his
children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing
what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what
he has promised him."
20 Then the LORD said, "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so
great and their sin so grievous 21 that I will go down and see if what they
have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know."

[22]The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD.

COMMENTARY

16 As the three men arise and look out toward Sodom, Abraham accompanies them to send them off. The men have been offstage for most of the preceding narrative. The author brings them back into view just before the Lord speaks in v.17. In so doing the author once again establishes an association between the Lord's presence and the appearance of the three men.

In the middle of v.16 the author skillfully begins to turn the narrative toward ch. 19. The reader's attention is directed to a seemingly insignificant gesture on the part of the three men as they rise to leave: "They looked down [wayyaśqipû] toward Sodom." As the men's heads turn to gaze down over the doomed city, the reader's attention is also directed toward that city in anticipation of the events of the next chapter. The preoccupation with the events surrounding the announcement of the birth of Isaac, which has played a dominant role in the narrative thus far, suddenly vanishes and is not again seen until its fulfillment in ch. 21.

17 – 19 The syntax of v.17 suggests that the narrator may be intending to recount the Lord's words directly to the reader. Without these verses (vv.17 – 19) the narrative would read smoothly from v.16 to v.20. These intervening verses, however, provide an important context for the discourse between the Lord and Abraham. Like other such direct discourse in Genesis, the words of the Lord here reveal the inner motivation for his actions ("what I am about to do," v.17). His words are concise, but they have far-reaching consequences. Verse 18 looks back to the original promise that Abraham will become a "great . . . nation" (cf. 12:2a) and that "all nations on earth will be blessed through him" (cf. 12:3b).

Verse 19 expands on 17:1 ("walk before me and be blameless"). Nowhere else in the book do we have such a reflective perspective on the events of the whole of the Abrahamic narratives. First, the Lord puts into words that which has been a central part of the narrative but has not yet been expressly verbalized, namely, Abraham's election: "I have chosen him" (*y'da'tîhû*). Second, the Lord goes on to

express his purpose (ʾmaʿan) in choosing Abraham. As it turns out, this purpose goes beyond what has been revealed in the preceding narratives. Here the attention is directed internally ("to keep the way of the LORD") with the end in view that Abraham and his descendants do "what is right and just." Only then (ʾmaʿan) will the Lord fulfill what he had promised to Abraham ("so that [ʾmaʿan] the LORD will bring about for Abraham what he has promised").

The notion of an internalized obedience is close in meaning to the terms of the "new covenant" found in the prophetic literature ("I will put my law in their minds and write it in their hearts," Jer 31:33) and is deeply rooted in the theology of Deuteronomy ("The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and all your soul, and [ʾmaʿan] live," 30:6).

20 – 21 Though v.20 continues the Lord's speaking, the syntax of the verse suggests that his words are to be put in a different setting from those that precede. In vv.17 – 19 the Lord was merely thinking aloud or the author was simply recalling what the Lord had mused on another occasion not within the immediate sequence of events. In any case, Abraham is not the one addressed in those verses. But in vv.20 – 21 Abraham is addressed. The Lord's words to him answer the question posed by the Lord in v.17 ("Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"). Thus vv.20 – 21 reveal to Abraham what the Lord is about to do, namely, go down to investigate the wickedness of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.

22 It should be noted that the narrative first states that "the LORD" (*yhwh*) says, "I will go down and see" (v.21); the narrative continues by stating that "the men [hāʾănāšîm] turned away and went toward Sodom." Thus once again the Lord and the men are brought into close association so that the actions of the one are identified with the actions of the other. It is important to notice at this point the inherent logic of the narrative, since the same logic follows the reader into the next chapter. If "the men" are the emissaries of the Lord and represent his presence amid everyday affairs, then when they journey to Sodom and Gomorrah, as here, it can rightly be said that the Lord himself is visiting these cities.

As has been the case thus far, "the men"[hāʾănāšîm] represent the Lord's

appearance, but at the same time they are never actually identified with the Lord. Thus the fact that the Lord remains behind after two of "the men" have left is no more of a surprise than the fact that the Lord is again present with Lot in Sodom along with two of "the men" (19:12, 16; see discussion above). So when the Lord says, "I will go down and see" (18:21), the reader is asked to conclude that, as in ch. 18, "the men" in ch. 19 represented the Lord's presence with Lot.

One question remains. If the three men left Abraham, why do only "two messengers" (šᵊnê hammalʾākîm, 19:1) arrive in Sodom? It seems reasonably clear that the two messengers who visit Lot are two of the "three men" who have visited Abraham. But what has happened to the third "man"?

This question has given rise to several speculations about the identity of the man, or angel, who does not visit Sodom. A common explanation is that this "man" is a "christophany," that is, an appearance of the second person of the Trinity in human form, before the incarnation. When the narrative says that "the men [hāʾᵃnāšîm] turned away and went toward Sodom" while the Lord remains with Abraham, and then further when it mentions that only "two angels/messengers" (19:1) come to Sodom, it seems to suggest that one of the men must have stayed behind with Abraham. Since we know that the Lord stays behind, that "man" must have been the Lord. The conclusion then drawn is that Abraham was visited by the preincarnate Christ accompanied by two "angels" (19:1). Waltke identifies Abraham's three visitors as "'The LORD' and two angels." He is not clear whether he believes that "the LORD" here is the preincarnate Christ (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 265).

Though this interpretation has many features of the narrative in its favor, it overlooks the fairly certain fact that although Lot fails to appreciate it, the author of the narrative sees the two messengers in ch. 19 as representative of *the presence of the Lord* (e.g.,"And Lot said to them,'No, Lord,' " 19:18, NIV mg.), just like the three men in ch. 18. Thus, the fact that the men in ch. 18 are referred to as "the Lord" does not mean that only one of them is actually the Lord; rather, all three represent the Lord's presence. If the two men in ch. 19 can be addressed as "the Lord" even though they merely represent the Lord, so also can the three men in ch. 18 (e.g., v.3). Hence, after calling attention to the fact that Lot is visited by only two messengers, the author refers to them simply as "the men," as in ch. 18.

The question still remains, however, that if all three men leave Abraham and travel toward Sodom, why is Lot visited by only two men rather than the three men of ch. 18? Where does the third man go, if not to Sodom? The answer to that question is readily at hand in ch. 18. It seems clear that the two men in Sodom are carrying out of the Lord's intention to "go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry" (18:21). But how does the Lord investigate the "outcry of Gomorrah"? Did he not also say he was going down to Gomorrah to see their deeds too? Since the narrative records only the events of the men's visit to Sodom, where Lot lives (13:12), and since at the conclusion of ch. 19 the mention is made not only of the Lord's destruction of Sodom but also of Gomorrah (v.24a), the question is left open as to whether the Lord also investigated the "outcry of Gomorrah." If we follow the logic of chs. 18 and 19, it seems apparent that the author would have us conclude that the third man went to Gomorrah to carry out a similar task in that city.

In other words, by specifying the number of men who visit Lot in Sodom, the author leaves the narrative of ch. 19 open to a reading that harmonizes at all points and leaves the reader with an answer to the question of the Lord's righteous and just treatment of Gomorrah. Although unstated, the solution is ready at hand: the third man visits Gomorrah; thus "the Judge of all the earth" (v.25) "deals justly" (cf. 19:15b). It is this theme that is dealt with in the intervening narrative.

Notes

19 It is not unusual to translate יְדַעְתִּיו (*yᵉdaʿtîw*) as "I have chosen" in light of the general meaning of יָדַע (*yādaʿ*, "to take notice of, regard"; cf. 39:6; Dt 33:9). This is a similar use to Hosea 13:5 and Amos 3:2. The reading for *yādaʿtîw* reflected in the LXX — יְדַעְתִּי כִּי (*yᵉdaʿtî kî*, "I know that") — is likely the translator's own solution to the use of *yādaʿ* in this context, since he resorts to a similar solution for *yādaʿ* in Genesis 39:6.

22 The הָאֲנָשִׁים (*hāʾănāšîm*, "the men") referred to here are the שְׁלֹשָׁה אֲנָשִׁים (*šᵉlōšâ ʾănāšîm*, "three men") of v.2, just as in v.16. It is the customary style in narrative to give the number of entities first and then to refer to them without the number. For example, once it is stated that "Noah had three sons" (6:10), they are

subsequently referred to simply as “your/his sons” הָאֲנָשִׁים (hā·’ă·nā·šîm.

d. Abraham’s intercession (18:23 – 33)

23 Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the
righteous with the wicked? 24 What if there are fifty righteous people in the
city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of
the fifty righteous people in it? 25 Far be it from you to do such a thing — to
kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righ teous and the wicked
alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”
26 The LORD said, “If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I
will spare the whole place for their sake.”
27 Then Abraham spoke up again: “Now that I have been so bold as to
speak to the Lord, though I am nothing but dust and ashes, 28 what if the
number of the righteous is five less than fifty? Will you destroy the whole
city because of five people?”
“If I find forty-five there,” he said, “I will not destroy it.”
29 Once again he spoke to him,“What if only forty are found there?”
He said, “For the sake of forty, I will not do it.”
30 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak. What if
only thirty can be found there?”
He answered, “I will not do it if I find thirty there.”
31 Abraham said,“Now that I have been so bold as to speak to the Lord,
what if only twenty can be found there?”
He said, “For the sake of twenty, I will not destroy it.”
32 Then he said, “May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once
more. What if only ten can be found there?”
He answered, “For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it.”
33 When the LORD had finished speaking with Abraham, he left, and
Abraham returned home.

COMMENTARY

23 – 33 The central issue of the discourse between Abraham and the Lord is expressed in Abraham’s question, “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?”

(v.25). The Lord's answer, echoed throughout the narrative, is a resounding "Yes." Abraham persists with the question until it is conclusively dealt with.

The sequence Abraham follows has been variously interpreted. He starts with a question about fifty righteous men in a city and concludes with the question of ten righteous men. Why does he stop at ten? Why not make the petition if there are nine men, eight men, and so on? Does he not care about Lot and his family, who only number four? The narrative of 19:29 shows that the author considers Lot to have been the central "righteous" one under discussion (cf. 2Pe 2:7). Why then does Abraham not extend his line of questions down to four?

One possible answer is that the sequence of fifty down to ten, in units of ten, naturally ends with ten; the next question would have been, "What if there are no righteous left in the city?" The answer to that question is not the concern of Abraham, since he is interested only in the salvation of the righteous amid the unrighteous, not the destruction of the wicked. Thus with ten men Abraham has his answer and does not need to pursue the question to the exact number. So the author of the narrative cuts off the questioning at this point to allow the issue to remain at the general level.

In Abraham's concern for Lot, the narrative addresses the larger issue of God's treatment of any righteous person (not merely Lot) in his judgment of the wicked. It is also important to notice that in the narrative that follows (ch. 19), the city of Sodom is not spared in Lot's behalf. The city is destroyed, and Lot is taken out of the city — a scenario not anticipated in Abraham's line of questions. Perhaps, then, within the narrative at the close of ch. 18, Abraham's abrupt conclusion to his questions is intended to suit the events of the narrative in ch. 19. By ending the questions at ten righteous in the city, the narrative leaves open the question of what God will do if fewer than ten righteous are found in there. Thus, Abraham's questions and God's reply harmonize with the actual course of events in ch. 19 where the city is not spared in Lot's behalf. It should also be pointed out that as the narrative continues in ch. 19, though Sodom is not spared for Lot's sake, the little city of Zoar is spared in Lot's behalf (see comments on 19:17 – 22).

7. Lot and Sodom (19:1 – 38)

a. Two angels at Sodom (19:1 – 14)

[1]The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in
the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and
bowed down with his face to the ground. [2]"My lords," he said, "please turn
aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night
and then go on your way early in the morning."

"No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square."

[3]But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his
house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they
ate. [4]Before they had gone to bed, all the men from every part of the city of
Sodom — both young and old —surrounded the house. [5]They called to Lot,
"Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that
we can have sex with them."

[6]Lot went outside to meet them and shut the door behind him [7]and said,
"No, my friends. Don't do this wicked thing. [8]Look, I have two daughters
who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you
can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for
they have come under the protection of my roof."

[9]"Get out of our way," they replied. And they said, "This fellow came
here as an alien, and now he wants to play the judge! We'll treat you worse
than them." They kept bringing pressure on Lot and moved forward to
break down the door.

[10]But the men inside reached out and pulled Lot back into the house and
shut the door. [11]Then they struck the men who were at the door of the
house, young and old, with blindness so that they could not find the door.

[12]The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here — sons-in-
law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get
them out of here, [13]because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry
to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."

[14]So Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, who were pledged to
marry his daughters. He said, "Hurry and get out of this place, because the
LORD is about to destroy the city!" But his sons-in-law thought he was
joking.

COMMENTARY

1a According to vv.10, 12, and 16, the two "angels" of v.1 are "men" [*hā*ᵉ*nāšîm*]. The definite article on the word "angels" (*hammalʾākîm*, or "messengers") suggests that the two men have already been identified and thus are the men who visited Abraham (18:3).The fact that only two of the three men (18:2) are sent to investigate the "outcry" of Sodom (18:20) supports the notion that the third man investigates the city of Gomorrah (18:20; see comments on 18:16 – 22). We hear nothing more about the third man. What is of most importance is that toward the end of the narrative, the men's appearance, as in ch. 18, is openly represented as a visitation by the Lord (v.18: "But Lot said to *them* 'No, Lord [*ʾădōnāy*]' "; cf. NIV mg., and see previous discussion on ch. 18). The men (or angels) have come to carry out the Lord's judgment against the wicked city (19:13b). Furthermore, in response to Abraham's prayer for the righteous (18:23 – 32), they have also come to rescue Lot (19:29).

1b – 11 The depiction of the events at Lot's house on the eve of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah lays the groundwork for the divine judgment about to fall on the two cities. It is evidence of the "outcry" mentioned already in 18:20. Even Lot, the righteous one who is rescued, appears to have been tainted by his association with Sodom. Unlike Abraham, who immediately recognizes God's presence in the visit of the men (18:2), Lot appears insensitive to God's presence represented by the messengers and addresses them only as "sirs" [*ʾădōnāy*, v.2; NIV, "lords"). Though Lot, like Abraham, is hospitable and can by no means be classed with the men of Sodom, his suggestion that the men of the city take his own daughters and do with them what they please can hardly serve (within this narrative) as a token of his righteous character (v.8). In fact, at the close of the narrative and in an ironic turn of events, Lot inadvertently carries out what he here proposes to the men of Sodom: he lies with his own daughters (vv.30 – 38).

Behind this clear contrast between Abraham and Lot is an attempt to show the consequences of Lot's earlier decision to "pitch his tents near Sodom" (13:12). At the close of the narrative, Lot is identified as the father of the Moabites and Ammonites.

12 – 14 The messengers revealed to Lot their twofold purpose. They have

been sent to destroy the city and to rescue Lot and his family (vv.12 – 13). The response of Lot's two "sons-in-law" (v.14) identifies them with the men of the city. To them the idea of divine judgment is a "laughing matter" (*way'hî kimṣaḥēq,* v.14; NIV, "thought they were joking"). The link between their "laughter," the "laughter" of Sarah (18:12, 13, 15[2x]), and the "laughter" of Abraham (17:17) is obvious and provides a bridge across these narratives to the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise in the birth of Isaac, whose name means "laughter" (*yiṣḥāq*).

NOTES

2 This is the only occurrence of אֲדֹנָי (*ʾᵃdōnay,* "my lords"), with short final dipthong, in the MT. Its use here shows clearly that אֲדֹנָי (*ʾᵃdōnāy*) in 18:3 is intentional. The Masoretes have marked it as חולֿ (*ḥwl*), meaning it should not be taken as a reference to God (Baer, *Liber Genesis*, 22). It is consistent that the plural verbs (e.g., סוּרוּ נָא, *sûrû nāʾ,* "please turn") and pronouns (e.g., עַבְדְּכֶם, *ʿabdᵉkem,* "your servant's") are used with it. This suggests further that the distinction between , *ʾᵃdōnāy* in 18:3, which has singular verbs, and *ʾᵃdōnāy* here is not merely a Masoretic tradition but rather preserves an important element in the narrative itself.

6 The singular סָגַר (*sāgar,* "[he] shut") shows the same interchange between singular and plural as ch. 18 (see Notes). As the identity of the two messengers becomes clearer within the narrative, the interchange between their being referred to as singular and as plural increases. Notice that in vv.18 – 19, once Lot knows that the men are from God, he speaks "to them" (plural, אֲלֵהֶם, *ʾᵃlēhem*) with singular verbs (e.g., עָשִׂיתָ, *ʿāśîtā,* "you have shown") and pronouns (e.g., עַבְדְּךָ, *ʿabdᵉka,* "your [singular] servant").

13 – 14 The phrase "because we are going to destroy this place" in v.13 is repeated by Lot as "because the LORD is about to destroy the city" in v.14; this shows the close association between the men and the Lord.

b. Lot's deliverance (19:15 – 28)

15With the coming of dawn, the angels urged Lot, saying, “Hurry! Take
your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away
when the city is punished.”
16When he hesitated, the men grasped his hand and the hands of his wife
and of his two daughters and led them safely out of the city, for the LORD
was merciful to them. 17As soon as they had brought them out, one of them
said,“Flee for your lives! Don’t look back, and don’t stop anywhere in the
plain! Flee to the mountains or you will be swept away!”
18But Lot said to them, “No, my lords, please! 19Your servant has found
favor in your eyes, and you have shown great kindness to me in sparing my
life. But I can’t flee to the mountains; this disaster will overtake me, and I’ll
die. 20Look, here is a town near enough to run to, and it is small. Let me
flee to it — it is very small, isn’t it? Then my life will be spared.”
21He said to him,“Very well, I will grant this request too; I will not
overthrow the town you speak of. 22But flee there quickly, because I cannot
do anything until you reach it.” (That is why the town was called Zoar.)
23By the time Lot reached Zoar, the sun had risen over the land. 24Then
the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah — from
the LORD out of the heavens. 25Thus he overthrew those cities and the
entire plain, including all those living in the cities — and also the
vegetation in the land. 26But Lot’s wife looked back, and she became a
pillar of salt.
27Early the next morning Abraham got up and returned to the place
where he had stood before the LORD. 28He looked down toward Sodom
and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain, and he saw dense smoke
rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace.

COMMENTARY

15 – 16 In contrast to the account of the wickedness of the city of Sodom, which is placed in the darkness of night (vv.2, 4 – 5), the rescue of Lot occurs at the break of day (v.15). In turning the reader’s attention to such details, the writer draws on a common biblical image that pictures salvation as a sunrise dispelling the darkness (see comment on 1:2) and consequently provides a larger context for viewing the events of this chapter. In contrast to the men of Sodom, who blindly grope for the door of Lot’s house, Lot and his family are taken by

the hand and led out of the city to safety (v.16).

To show that the rescue of Lot is a divine response to the prayer of Abraham, the angels' words explicitly recall Abraham's prayer in behalf of the righteous: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" (18:23). Note how the messengers warn Lot and his family to leave the city, "or you will be swept away when the city is punished" (19:15; again in v.17, "or you will be swept away"). In addition, we are explicitly reminded that Lot's rescue is an answer to Abraham's prayer in the previous chapter: "[God] remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived" (v.29).

The picture of Lot, then, is that of a righteous man living amid the unrighteous — a righteous man being rescued from the fate of the wicked through divine intervention. Moreover, not surprisingly, the basis of God's rescue of Lot is not Lot's righteousness but the Lord's compassion. When the men take hold of Lot and lead him and his family out of the doomed city, the writer is careful to note that this is because "the LORD was merciful to them" (v.16). While Lot may have been righteous (cf. Abraham's prayer "for the righteous" in ch. 18, inferring that Lot is the "righteous one"), the account of the rescue itself emphasizes God's compassion. Lot's words to the messengers (19:19) reinforce the role of God's grace in the rescue of Lot. Lot acknowledges that he has found "favor" (*ḥēn*) and "kindness" (*ḥasdᵉkā*) before God.

17 – 22 A brief episode is recounted at the conclusion of Lot's rescue that prolongs the reader's attention. Lot requests shelter in the nearby city of Zoar (v.20), and in granting the request the Lord saves the city of Zoar from destruction (v.21). The narrative effect of this short episode strengthens the author's viewpoint that Lot's rescue is a result of prayer, both Abraham's and his own (*hinnēh-nāʾ*, v.19, lit., "behold now"; untrans. in NIV). With Lot's request, the actual circumstances envisioned in Abraham's prayer (Ge 18:23 – 33) are realized: God saves a city on account of the righteous ones in it. Though Sodom is destroyed, Zoar is saved from the destruction because of Lot (v.21).

By including this episode the author has headed off an interpretive problem between chs. 18 and 19. If Lot is the "righteous one" Abraham's prayer envisioned in ch. 18, why does the Lord not save the city of Sodom in his

behalf? Whatever specific answer is given to that question, the point of 19:17 – 22 is that Abraham's prayer is answered, and God does save Zoar on account of the righteous one living in it.

23 – 28 The perspective of the narrative widens in scope as it recounts the destruction of the cities of the plain. We are reminded of two things before the onset of God's judgment: "The sun had arisen over the land" (v.23b), and "Lot reached Zoar [safely]" (v.23a). The mention of the sun ties this section together with Lot's early morning rescue (v.15) as well as with the larger biblical picture of the "sunrise" as an image of divine salvation for the righteous and divine judgment on the wicked (Isa 9:2; Mal 4:1 – 2). With that as an introduction, the author depicts a vivid scene of divine judgment: "The LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah" (vv.24 – 25).

As in the story of the flood (chs. 6 – 8), the narrative does not dwell on the destruction of the cities. Rather, it focuses our attention on the response of two individuals, Lot's wife and Abraham, both of whom "look" at the destruction of the cities, but with very different consequences. Few details are given about either. Lot's wife becomes a "pillar of salt" because she "looked back" (v.26). Apparently she suffers the same fate as those in the city on whom it rained burning sulfur, because she, as they, disobeys the words of the men (or angels; "Don't look back, and don't stop anywhere in the plain! Flee to the mountains," v.17).

The double warning — i. e., "don't look; don't tarry" — that the men give Lot and his family may provide an important narrative clue as to the exact nature of the actions of Lot's wife. In light of the warning, we can perhaps infer that she does not simply look behind her but rather "tarries" to look in the valley and hence is swept away with the wicked. Abraham, however, looks from a vantage point consistent with the men's words in v.17. So the writer tells us that Abraham is back at "the place where he had stood before the LORD" (v.27) and that "he looked down toward Sodom and Gomorrah, toward all the land of the plain" (v.28). Abraham, though obviously unaware of the men's instructions to Lot and his family, obeys the words and is spared the destruction.

Abraham is one who obeys and pleases God, though with little external instruction. Lot's wife, by contrast, knows what to do but fails to do it. It is

important to note that the narrative allows us to view the smoldering ruins from Abraham's perspective rather than Lot's. Clearly the central figure in the narrative is Abraham. It is his intercession that results in Lot's rescue; so we return to the perspective of Abraham to the place where he was at the time of the intercession to see a final glimpse of the effect of that prayer.

The reader is not advised what Abraham may have been thinking as he watches the smoke billow up from the ruined cities. He is silent; his thoughts are his own. But since the writer has deliberately turned our attention back to the scene of Abraham's prayer in ch. 18, it is hard not to see in this final scene a reminder of the central question of that prayer: "Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (v.25). At this point in the narrative, the answer to Abraham's question is made graphically clear. Sodom stands guilty before God, deserving of divine wrath. Lot has been rescued and Abraham himself is spared from the destruction. Only the disobedient among them, Lot's sons-in-law and his wife, have perished along with the guilty. The whole narrative seems carefully planned to focus the reader's attention on these points of divine justice.

NOTES

22 "That is why the town was called Zoar" refers back to 14:2 (see Notes).

24 The syntax W + X + QATAL suggests that this verse provides background information to the main clause of v.25. Notice that the reference to both סְדֹם (*sᵉdōm*, "Sodom") and עֲמֹרָה (*ʿᵉmōrâ*, "Gomorrah") aligns the narrative with 18:20.

c. Lot's incest (19:29 – 38)

[29]So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot had lived.

[30]Lot and his two daughters left Zoar and settled in the mountains, for he was afraid to stay in Zoar. He and his two daughters lived in a cave. [31]One day the older daughter said to the younger,"Our father is old, and there is no

man around here to lie with us, as is the custom all over the earth. [32]Let's get our father to drink wine and then lie with him and preserve our family line through our father."

[33]That night they got their father to drink wine, and the older daughter went in and lay with him. He was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

[34]The next day the older daughter said to the younger,"Last night I lay with my father. Let's get him to drink wine again tonight, and you go in and lie with him so we can preserve our family line through our father." [35]So they got their father to drink wine that night also, and the younger daughter went and lay with him. Again he was not aware of it when she lay down or when she got up.

[36]So both of Lot's daughters became pregnant by their father. [37]The older daughter had a son, and she named him Moab; he is the father of the Moabites of today. [38]The younger daughter also had a son, and she named him Ben-Ammi; he is the father of the Ammonites of today.

COMMENTARY

29 – 38 The writer returns to Lot in the concluding narrative of ch. 19.Verse 29 is a reminder of Abraham's role in Lot's rescue:"[God] remembered Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe." Any merit on Lot's part that may have resulted in his rescue has been subordinated to the central importance of Abraham's intercession in his behalf. As such the writer is carrying through with the theme of God's promise: in Abraham and his offspring, "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (12:3). With that reminder the writer is free to recount the events of the final days of Lot — events that cast Lot in a very different light.

Ironically, in his own drunkenness Lot carries out the shameful act that he himself suggested to the men of Sodom (19:8): he lies with his own daughters (vv.32 – 36). The account is remarkably similar to the story of the last days of Noah after his rescue from the flood (9:20 – 27).There, as here, the father becomes drunk with wine and uncovers himself in the presence of his children with negative consequences. Thus at the close of the two great narratives of divine judgment, the flood and the destruction of Sodom, those saved from

God's wrath subsequently fall into a form of sin reminiscent of those who died in the judgment. Such is a common theme in the prophetic literature (e.g., Isa 65 – 66; Mal 1).

The introduction and body of this final story is characterized by numerous wordplays and repetitions (see Notes on vv.29 – 30). Its purpose has been taken to be both positive (Westermann, 384) and negative (Delitzsch, 62). The positive characteristics of the story rest primarily on its relationship to other narratives in Genesis in which the focus rests on preservation of the "seed" at all costs (e.g.,Tamar in ch. 38). The negative aspects of the story stem from the drunkenness and incest that play a central role in the plan of the daughters: "If it was not lust, therefore, which impelled them to this shameful deed, their conduct was worthy of Sodom, and shows quite as much as their previous betrothal to men of Sodom, that they were deeply imbued with the sinful character of that city" (Keil, 237).

But in the light of such narratives as Genesis 38, where the equally shameful deed of Tamar is marked as "righteous" (v.26) in view of its purpose, we should probably look beyond the moral aspects of this narrative for our final assessment. Through the clever plan of the daughters, the line of Lot is preserved. Deuteronomy 2:9 and 19, which speak of the "sons of Lot" (NIV, "descendants") in warm and accepting terms, show that this narrative is not likely a mere polemic against the Moabites and Ammonites.

But the same ambiguity in this narrative regarding the actions of Lot's daughters can be found elsewhere in the Torah's view of the Moabites and the Ammonites. Though they are considered Israel's relatives, they are excluded from Israel's worship (Dt 23:3 – 4). Keil is correct in pointing out that the exclusion of the Moabites and Ammonites from the Holy Place in Deuteronomy 23 is based on their mistreatment of Israel during the time of the conquest. They did not meet them with bread and water as brothers, and they hired Balaam to curse the Israelites (Nu 22:4 – 20; Dt 23:4).

Lot is mentioned as the father of the Moabites and the Ammonites in Deuteronomy 2:9, 19, the passage that stresses their relationship to Israel, but not in Deuteronomy 23, where they are excluded from the congregation. Thus the present narrative should probably not be taken as the basis of Israel's conflict

with her neighbors; rather, it pictures them as survivors of God's judgment and benefactors of his mercy.

Both the Moabites and Ammonites continued to play an important role in later biblical history. Located in Transjordan and southeast of Israelite territory, these two kingdoms frequently came into conflict with the Israelites (see Jdg 3:12 – 30; 11:4 – 33; 1Sa 11:1 – 11; 2Sa 8:2; 10:1 – 19; 2Ki 3). In the book of Ruth, the Moabitess Ruth personifies the question of the inclusion of Gentiles in the covenantal promises to Abraham. Note too that during the Babylonian exile, the Moabites and Ammonites provided a safe refuge for the Jews who fled Judah (Jer 40:11).

NOTES

29 – 30 Note these wordplays in these two verses.

1. V.29a וַיְהִי בְּשַׁחֵת (*wayʿhî bʿšaḥēt*, "So when"), with v.29b וַיְשַׁלַּח (*wayʿšallaḥ*, "he brought")
2. V.29a הַכִּכָּר (*hakkikkār*, "the plain"), with v.29a וַיִּזְכֹּר (*wayyizkōr*, "he remembered")
3. V.29b הַהַפֵּכָה (*haḥpēkâ*, "the catastrophe"), with v.29b בַּהֲפֹךְ (*baḥpōk*, "that overthrew")
4. V.30a, מִצּוֹעַר ... בְּצוֹעַר (*miṣṣōʿar ... bʿṣōʿar*, lit., "from Zoar ... in Zoar"), with v.30c בִּמְעָרָה (*bimʿārâ*, "in a cave")

And note these repetitions:

1. V.29a אֱלֹהִים (*ʾĕlōhîm*, "God"), v.29a אֱלֹהִים (*ʾĕlōhîm*, "God")
2. V.29a עָרֵי (*ʿārê*, "cities of"), v.29b הֶעָרִים (*heʿārîm*, "the cities")
3. V.29b לוֹט (*lôṭ*, "Lot"), v.30a לוֹט (*lôṭ*, "Lot")
4. V.30a וַיֵּשֶׁב (*wayyēšeb*, "and [he] settled"), v.30b, c וַיֵּשֶׁב ... לָשָׁבֶת (*lāšebet ... wayyēšeb*, "to stay ... lived")
5. V.30a וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו (*ûšĕtê bĕnōtāyw*, "and his two daughters"), v.30c וּשְׁתֵּי בְנֹתָיו (*ûšĕtê bĕnōtāyw*, "and his two daughters")

34 – 37 A wordplay may be intended between מֵאָבִינוּ (*mēʾābînû*, "from our father," v.34b), מֵאֲבִיהֶן (*mēʾăbîhen*, "from their father," v.36b), מוֹאָב (*môʾāb*, "Moab," v.37a), and אֲבִי מוֹאָב (*ʾăbî môʾāb*, "father of the Moabites," v.37b).

E. Abraham and Abimelech (20:1 – 18)

Overview

The focus of the narrative of chs. 20 and 21 is on the relationship between Abraham and the nations. Abraham's role is that of a prophetic intercessor, as in the promise that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:3). He prays for the Philistines (20:7), and God heals them (v.17). In the narrative Abimelech plays the role of a "righteous Gentile" with whom Abraham can live in peace and blessing. There is, then, an implied contrast in the narratives between chs. 19 (wherein Lot represents the mixed multitude) and 20 (wherein Abimelech represents the righ teous sojourner).

[1]Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and
lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, [2]and there
Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king
of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her.

[3]But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You
are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married
woman."

[4]Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you
destroy an innocent nation? [5]Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and
didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear
conscience and clean hands."

[6]Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a
clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is
why I did not let you touch her.

[7]Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you
and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and
all yours will die."

[8]Early the next morning Abimelech summoned all his officials, and when
he told them all that had happened, they were very much afraid. 9Then
Abimelech called Abraham in and said, "What have you done to us? How
have I wronged you that you have brought such great guilt upon me and my
kingdom? You have done things to me that should not be done." [10]And
Abimelech asked Abraham, "What was your reason for doing this?"

[11]Abraham replied,"I said to myself, 'There is surely no fear of God in
this place, and they will kill me because of my wife.' [12]Besides, she really
is my sister, the daughter of my father though not of my mother; and she
became my wife. [13]And when God had me wander from my father's

household, I said to her, ‘This is how you can show your love to me: Everywhere we go, say of me, “He is my brother.”’ ”

[14]Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. [15]And Abimelech said, “My land is before you; live wherever you like.”

[16]To Sarah he said, “I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated.”

[17]Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his slave girls so they could have children again, [18]for the LORD had closed up every womb in Abimelech’s household because of Abraham’s wife Sarah.

COMMENTARY

1 Abraham now leaves the “great trees of Mamre” (18:1, 33) and travels to “the Negev” (*hannegeb*, i.e., “southward”), sojourning in Gerar. The fact that the author reminds us in 21:23b, 34a) that Abraham is still sojourning in Gerar suggests that all the events of these two chapters take place in the “land of the Philistines” (21:34).

2 Sarah is taken into Abimelech’s house. Notice how truncated this part of the narrative is compared to the story of a similar event in ch. 12. What there developed into a full story is here condensed into a single verse. Clearly the interest of the author is not so much on the fate of Sarah as it is on that of the Philistines. Many of the details of this event (e.g., Abraham’s motive and intention in the deception, as well as a partial rationalization of the deception itself) are withheld until Abraham is given an opportunity to speak in his own behalf (vv.11 – 13). At that point his actions cast more light on the Philistines’ inner motives than on his own. Abraham’s words show that he has mistakenly judged the Philistines to be a wicked people — a judgment that the Philistines through their actions prove false.

3 – 16 The narrator goes to great lengths to demonstrate the innocence of the Philistine king Abimelech. Before he pleads his own innocence (v.4b), the author makes certain that we get all the facts straight about Sarah by informing us that

“Abimelech had not gone near her” (v.4a). Thus, when Abimelech claims “innocence” (*ṣaddîq*, lit., “righteous”) and appeals to this innocence in the face of Abraham’s deception, the reader can do no other than side with him. All the information points in his favor. Indeed, the matter is once and for all settled when God himself concurs with Abimelech’s plea of innocence, saying, “I know you did this with a clear conscience” (v.6).

Having demonstrated Abimelech’s innocence, the narrative then points to a potentially disastrous feature of his relationship with Abraham. Abimelech was in immediate need of a warning lest he forfeit his innocence by mistreating Abraham’s household. Abraham’s wife must be returned, and Abraham, the prophet, must pray for Abimelech’s life (v.7).

The surprising outcome of God’s visitation of Abimelech is that the king responds immediately by rising early in the morning (v.8) and declaring his dream to his servants and then to Abraham. The last statement in v.8 shows the mood of the Philistines: “the men were very much afraid.” Like the sailors and the king of Nineveh in Jonah 1:16; 3:6 – 9, the Philistines respond quickly and decisively to God’s warning. Also like Jonah, however, Abraham in this narrative appears as a reluctant prophet.

Abraham’s reply (vv.11 – 13) is not only an attempt to justify his plan with Sarah in the present narrative but also provides a larger picture for understanding his actions earlier in Egypt (Ge 12). By tracing his plan back to the beginnings of his sojourn from his father’s house (v.13), he shows that, in this instance, the plan is not based on his fear of the Philistines; rather, it is a part of a larger scheme. Abraham says, in effect, “Whenever I travel, I have always asked Sarah to say she is my sister” (v.13). In this way an explanation is provided for Abraham’s misjudgment of the Philistines.

The reader is at somewhat at a loss to evaluate Abraham’s explanation. Though we have followed his life closely since he left his father’s house in ch. 11, this is the first we hear of such an overarching strategy on his part with respect to Sarah. In the last analysis we are left only with the opinion of Abimelech himself, who undoubtedly accepts Abraham’s explanation and faults only himself in this unfortunate situation. Just how sincerely Abimelech accepts Abraham’s story can be seen in the fact that in speaking to Sarah he calls

Abraham “your brother” (v.16), showing that he accepts the explanation and in turn is attempting to restore the broken relationship with expensive gifts.

17 – 18 Abraham accepts gifts from the Philistines and, in turn, offers a prayer in their behalf (v.17). Only at this point do we discover the nature of God’s words to Abimelech earlier in v.7 (“You may be sure that you and all yours will die”) —that is, the Lord had “closed up every womb in Abimelech’s household” (v.18).

NOTES

1 There appears to be a conscious attempt to draw out the similarities between the event recounted in 12:9 - 20 and this one. Notice, for example, the way both narratives are introduced: “Then Abram set out and continued toward the Negev” (12:9), and “Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev” (20:1). These two similar narratives appear to have been intentionally placed on either side of the “Lot narratives.” The motivation behind that arrangement may have been to reinitiate the theme of “the promise in jeopardy,” which was interrupted by the judgment theme in the narratives about Lot.

There are also parallels and similarities between this chapter and the narrative in ch. 38 about Judah and Tamar. Both narratives concentrate on the “righteousness” of those not yet a part of the line of promise.

Note too that just at this point in the book, there is a cluster of narratives that focus the reader’s attention on the Gentile nations.

1. 19:29 – 38: Moabites, Ammonites
2. 20:1 – 18: Philistines

(21:1 – 8: Isaac’s birth)

3. 21:9 – 21: Ishmaelites
4. 21:22 – 34: Philistines

17 - 18 Since וַיֵּלְדוּ (wayyēlĕdû, “so they could have children again”; GK 3528) means “to bear” or “to beget” (BDB, s.v.), it would at first appear that the Philistines

began to bear children after God healed them. That would imply their illness resulted in their not being able to bear children. It is often assumed that the detection and effects of such an illness would necessitate a time period longer than the period of time that could be placed between the announcement of Isaac's birth in ch. 18 and the birth itself in ch. 21. But as Jacob, 474, has suggested, *wayyēlēdû* does not mean that they all, at that point in time, begat children in answer to Abraham's prayer. Rather, it means that as a result of their being well, they went on to have children again.Thus v.18 explains *wayyēlēdû* as infertility (cf. 16:2).

F. Abraham and Isaac (21:1 – 25:11)

1. The Birth of Isaac (21:1 – 7)

[1]Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. [2]Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. [3]Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him. [4]When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him. [5]Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

[6]Sarah said,"God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." [7]And she added,"Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."

COMMENTARY

1 – 7 Verse 1 picks up its central line of narrative from 18:10: "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."The stories of Lot and Abraham's sojourn with the Philistines have occupied most of the writer's attention for the last three chapters. Only now does he return to the promise of a son. One can hardly fail to ask why the news of the birth of Isaac has been delayed and treated so anticlimactically. Certainly more attention was paid to the *announcement* of the birth of the son in ch. 18 than here to the report

of the *accomplished fact*.

If we look for an answer to this question in the clues that come from the text, we may find it in the emphasis given in the narrative to the Lord's faithfulness to his word. The birth of Isaac came about "as [the LORD] had said," a fact stressed three times within vv.1 – 2. The plan not only comes about, but, more important, it happens as announced. Thus the narrative calls attention to God's faithfulness to his word and careful attention to the details of his plan.

The importance of the announcement of Isaac's birth is seen in the choice of the verb *paìqad* ("visited"; GK 7212; NIV, "was gracious") in v.1. Often this verb is used in contexts where the focus is on God's attentive care and concern (W. Schottroff, *THAT*, 2:470). In Exodus 3:16 the same word is translated, "I have watched." Frequently the word finds its parallel in the verb "to remember" (e.g., Isa 23:16 – 17) and may be meant here as a complement to passages such as Genesis 8:1 ("But God remembered Noah") and Exodus 2:24 ("God . . . remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob").

Also important is the reminder that Isaac is the "son . . . in [Abraham's] old age" (v.2) and that he is born "at the very time God had promised him." Thus the key themes of the earlier promise narratives (e.g., 18:10 – 14) are reiterated with the announcement of their fulfillment. While stressing the divine side of the fulfillment, the narrative also emphasizes Abraham's obedience: "When his son Isaac was eight days old, Abraham circumcised him, as God commanded him" (v.4; cf. 17:12).

Abraham is a hundred years old at the time Isaac is born (cf. 17:1, 24). Sarah's words — "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age" (v.7) — serve to emphasize his advanced age.

NOTES

1 The syntax of v.1 (W + X + QATAL) suggests that וַיהוָה פָּקַד (*wayhwh pāqad*, "Now the LORD was gracious") opens a new section and thus provides background for

the events that follow.

5 The chronological note that “Abraham was a hundred years old” refers to 17:24 - “Abraham was ninety-nine years old” - thus showing that the events of the intervening chapters (chs. 18 - 20) happened within a year’s time. It also reveals the age of Ishmael at this point. He is thirteen years old in 17:25, so by now he is fourteen.

2. Hagar and Ishmael (21:8 – 21)

[8]The child grew and was weaned, and on the day Isaac was weaned
Abraham held a great feast. [9]But Sarah saw that the son whom Hagar the
Egyptian had borne to Abraham was mocking, [10]and she said to Abraham,
“Get rid of that slave woman and her son, for that slave woman’s son will
never share in the inheritance with my son Isaac.”
[11]The matter distressed Abraham greatly because it concerned his son.
[12]But God said to him, “Do not be so distressed about the boy and your
maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac
that your offspring will be reckoned. [13]I will make the son of the
maidservant into a nation also, because he is your offspring.”
[14]Early the next morning Abraham took some food and a skin of water
and gave them to Hagar. He set them on her shoulders and then sent her off
with the boy. She went on her way and wandered in the desert of
Beersheba.
[15]When the water in the skin was gone, she put the boy under one of the
bushes. [16]Then she went off and sat down nearby, about a bowshot away,
for she thought, “I cannot watch the boy die.” And as she sat there nearby,
she began to sob.
[17]God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from
heaven and said to her, “What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God
has heard the boy crying as he lies there. [18]Lift the boy up and take him by
the hand, for I will make him into a great nation.”
[19]Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went
and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.
[20]God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the desert and became

an archer. [21]While he was living in the Desert of Paran, his mother got a wife for him from Egypt.

COMMENTARY

8 – 21 The similarities between this chapter and the earlier events in chs. 16 and 17 can hardly escape the attention of even the casual reader. Both chapters stress that God "heard" Hagar and Ishmael (16:10; 21:17) and will multiply their descendants into a great nation (16:10; 21:13, 18). The name "Ishmael" means "God hears" (16:13; cf. 21:17). Just as Ishmael was blessed and destined to become a "great nation" in 17:20, so once again God promises to "make him a great nation" because he is Abraham's offspring (21:13).

NOTES

9 מְצַחֵק (*mᵉṣaḥēq,* "mocking") is a wordplay on the name יִצְחָק (*yiṣḥāq,* "Isaac"); see comment on 17:17 - 18.

17 Although Ishmael's name is not mentioned in this chapter - he is referred to as הָגָר (*hāgār,* lit., "the son of Hagar," v.9a), בְּנָהּ (*bᵊnāh,* "her son," v.10a), בֶּן־הָאָמָה (*ben-hāʾāmâ,* "the servant woman's son," vv.10b, 13a), הַנַּעַר (*hannaʿar,* "the boy," vv.12a, 17a, 17b, 18a, 19b, 20a), הַיֶּלֶד (*hayyeled,* "the boy," vv.14a, 15b, 16a) - there is a wordplay on his name (יִשְׁמָעֵאל, *yišmāʿēʾl,* "Ishmael") in וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים (*wayyišmaʿ ʾĕlōhîm,* "God heard") and כִּי־שָׁמַע אֱלֹהִים (*kî-šāmaʿ ʾĕlōhîm,* "God has heard") in this verse.

3. Abraham and Abimelech (21:22 – 34)

[22]At that time Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do. [23]Now swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my children or my descendants. Show to me and the country where you are living as an alien the same kindness I have shown to you."

[24]Abraham said,"I swear it."

[25]Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well of water that Abimelech's servants had seized. [26]But Abimelech said, "I don't know who has done this. You did not tell me, and I heard about it only today."

[27]So Abraham brought sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech, and the two men made a treaty. [28]Abraham set apart seven ewe lambs from the flock, [29]and Abimelech asked Abraham, "What is the meaning of these seven ewe lambs you have set apart by themselves?"

[30]He replied, "Accept these seven lambs from my hand as a witness that I dug this well." [31]So that place was called Beersheba, because the two men swore an oath there.

[32]After the treaty had been made at Beersheba, Abimelech and Phicol the commander of his forces returned to the land of the Philistines. [33]Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God. [34]And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

COMMENTARY

22 – 34 The recurrence of Abimelech in v.22, though something of a surprise in the narrative, shows that the setting of these narratives has not changed and that Abraham is still living with the Philistines. This is confirmed at the conclusion of the narrative, which says that Abraham continued to sojourn with the Philistines "for a long time" (v.34).

The reader is forced to ask why our attention is constantly being drawn to the fact that Abraham is dwelling with the Philistines during this time. Perhaps it is to present a picture of Abraham as someone who has yet to experience the fulfillment of God's promises. Without the continuing accounts of Abraham's dealings with Abimelech, the other events in these narratives may easily be read within the context of the Promised Land. Thus, we see here a picture of an Abraham who does not live out all his days in the Promised Land but spends many of his days in exile. Even Isaac, the son of the promise, is not born in the Promised Land. Rather, he is born in exile and must sojourn there with his father, who "wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another" (Ps 105:13). The intention of the narrative seems close to that which the writer of Hebrews saw in these narratives. Hebrews 11:8 – 13 recalls that though

Abraham left his father's land and came to the Promised Land, he lived there "like a stranger in a foreign country . . . . they were aliens and strangers on earth."

The picture of Abraham in exile exemplifies God's care for the righteous who must suffer while waiting to enter the land. The servants of Abimelech steal Abraham's wells. But because God is with Abraham in all that he does (v.22), he makes a covenant with their king (v.27); and all is restored to him (v.32).

4. The Binding of Isaac (22:1 – 14)

[1]Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him,"Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.

[2]Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

[3]Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. [4]On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. [5]He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

[6]Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together, [7]Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

[8]Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

[9]When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10]Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. [11]But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

12"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

13Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. 14So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, "On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided."

COMMENTARY

1 – 14 The first verse of this narrative provides a necessary preliminary understanding of the events of this chapter. Without it God's request that Abraham offer up Isaac as a "burnt offering" is inexplicable. By stating clearly at the start that "God tested Abraham" (v.1), the writer quickly dispels any doubt about God's real purpose. There is, then, no thought of an actual sacrifice of Isaac in the narrative, though in the mind of Abraham, as portrayed in the narrative, a sacrifice is the only thought he can entertain. The whole narrative focuses so strongly on the Lord's request that the writer apparently senses the need to dispel any suspicion about the Lord's real intention. This is only a test.

Several features of the narrative keep the reader's attention focused on Abraham's inward struggle as he carries out the Lord's request — all, we might add, without any mention of Abraham's actual thoughts. First, there is the abruptness of the Lord's request within the narrative. Apart from the remark in v.1 that God's request represents a testing of Abraham, the reader has no advanced warning of the nature of the request or of its severity. Nothing in the preceding narratives has hinted at this sort of request. The reader, in other words, is as surprised as Abraham by the Lord's request. Second, the reader is given no further explanation of the request. The whole of the request is made up of three simple imperatives (v.2): "Take" (*qaḥ-nā'*), "go" (*wᵉlek*), and "sacrifice him" (*wᵉhaʿᵃlēhû*). Furthermore, the reader is given no reason to believe that Abraham has any further explanation.

As with many biblical narratives, the reader often knows crucial information

that the characters in the narrative do not. In this case the reader knows that this is a test. But apart from this, we know no more about God's plans and ways than the characters within the narrative. We are as much in the dark as Abraham about the intention of God's ways. Thus we, the readers, are forced to rely on Abraham's understanding as it is presented to us within the narrative. We must view the events of the narrative through his eyes and by means of his responses.

At the same time, in the absence of any additional explanations from the narrator, we are forced to read our own thoughts and feelings into those of Abraham. In the case of this narrative, the reader is given ample opportunity to do just that as the ensuing events are narrated. What is particularly noticeable is how the writer prolongs the narrative with excessive and deliberate details of Abraham's preparation for the journey and the journey itself. By allowing or, indeed, forcing the reader to follow one incidental and perfunctory act after the other (e.g., "[he] saddled his donkey" [v.3a], "he took with him two of his servants" [v.3b], "he had cut enough wood" [v.3c] — none of which acts prove essential to the narrative in the end), the writer forces the reader to look beyond these narratively meaningless external events to ponder the thoughts of Abraham himself as he so matter-of-factly carries them out. In effect, the writer gives us time to think. He slows the story down so we can think about it and its meaning.

The writer gives no hints as to the nature of Abraham's inner thoughts, but this is certainly only because no hints are really necessary. Who cannot imagine what Abraham felt? When at last someone in the narrative speaks, it is Isaac, not God, who breaks the silence; and the question he raises —"Where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"— serves only to heighten the anguish that the Lord's request brings to Abraham and by now to the reader.

When Abraham finally ends his narrative silence and speaks in reply to Isaac, for the first time he gives a hint at an answer by saying, "God himself will provide [*ʾĕlōhîm yirʾeh-lô*] a lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (v.8).That reply is not anticipated within the narrative, but the reply itself anticipates the final outcome of the story: "The LORD will provide" (*yhwh yirʾeh*, v.14). Thus midway through the narrative, the writer allows the final words of the story to appear and foreshadow the end. We begin to see where the story is going. The reader is assured thereby both of the outcome of the narrative and of the quality of Abraham's faith.

As Abraham begins to speak, his words cast light on his previous silence. Amid the anguish that the reader has read into Abraham's silence, there is now also a silent confidence in the Lord, who will provide. Abraham's words should not be understood as merely an attempt to calm a nervous Isaac. In light of the fact that they anticipate the outcome of the narrative, Abraham's words are to be read as a confident expression of his trust in God.

Few narratives in Genesis can equal this story in dramatic tension. The writer seems deliberately to prolong the tension of both Abraham and the reader in his depiction of the last moments, just before God interrupts the action and calls the test to a halt. Abraham's every action is described in exaggerated detail. At the last dramatic moment — "[Abraham] reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (v.10) — the Lord intervenes and, as Abraham has already anticipated, provides a substitute for the burnt offering. Abraham therefore names the altar he had built, "The LORD will provide" (*yhwh yir'eh*, v.14); and the writer adds, "And to this day it is said, 'On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided'" (*yhwh yērā'eh*).

NOTES

1 The two uses of "some time later" (lit., "and after these things") in vv.1, 20 show the author's conscious attempt to link the events into a definite chronological scheme (cf. 15:1).

The syntax of וְהָאֱלֹהִים נִסָּה אֶת־אַבְרָהָם (*w'hā'lōhîm nissâ 'et-'abrāhām*, "God tested Abraham"; W + X + QATAL) suggests that the clause contains essential background information for the following story.

2 לֶךְ־לְךָ (*lek-l'kā*, "go") and אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַמֹּרִיָּה (*'el-'ereṣ hammōriyâ*, "to the region of Moriah") appear to allude back to 12:1: לֶךְ־לְךָ (*lek-l'kā*, "leave") and אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אַרְאֶךָּ (*'el-hā'āreṣ 'ăšer 'ar'ekkā*, "to the land I will show you"). This suggests a wordplay between *hammōriyâ* and *rā'â* (רָאָה, "to see"). The word *hammōriyâ* is a place name for a site later identified with the location of the temple (cf. 2Ch 3:1). The Samaritan Pentateuch (המוראה, *hmwr'h*) and some early versions (e.g., Samar. Targ. , Symm.) also associate *hammōriyâ* with the verb *rā'â*. In light of the central role played in this chapter by the same verb (*rā'â*; see אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה, *'lōhîm yir'eh*, "God . . . will provide", v.8a; יְהוָה יִרְאֶה, *yhwh yir'eh*, "the LORD will provide," v.14a; יְהוָה יֵרָאֶה, *yhwh yērā'eh*, the

association of *hammōrîyâ* and *rāʾâ* is probably intentional.

In 2 Chronicles 3:1, which contains the only other occurrence of הַמֹּרִיָּה (*hammōrîyâ*) in the Bible, there is also a wordplay between *hammōrîyâ* and *nāʾâ* in אֲשֶׁר נִרְאָה לְדָוִיד אָבִיהוּ (*ʾăšer nirʾâ lᵊdāwîd ʾābîhû*, "where [the LORD] had appeared to David his father").

14 יִרְאֶה (*yirʾeh*, "will provide") is a Qal imperfect, whereas יֵרָאֶה (*yērāʾeh*, "it will be provided") is Niphal imperfect. The Niphal in v.14b is an explanation of Abraham's statement in v.14a (אֲשֶׁר, *ʾăšer*, functions as כִּי, *kî*; cf. 30:18; 31:49; BDB, 83) and links the statement to the appearance of the Lord in worship.

5. The Angel of the Lord (22:15 – 19)

> [15]The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time [16]and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, [17]I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, [18]and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."
>
> [19]Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba.

COMMENTARY

15 – 19 Attached to the end of the narrative is an account of a "second" encounter between Abraham and the angel of the Lord. Since in v.19 Abraham returns to the two young men who have accompanied him, this "second" encounter with the angel must be understood as having occurred on the same occasion as the first.

Why does the writer call attention to it as a "second" meeting? Perhaps its purpose is to draw attention to the fact that this second discourse comes at a

separate time and thus after Abraham has finished the burnt offering. By drawing attention to this fact, the writer has subtly but intentionally separated the account of the renewed promise (vv.16 – 18) from the narrative of Abraham's testing (vv.1 – 15). Perhaps this feature of the narrative is intended to show that the renewal of God's original promises to Abraham is not based on Abraham's specific actions in carrying out the test but rather on the faith and obedience he has shown through this test.

The promise reiterated here is similar to that of chs. 12 – 13, 15, and 17 – 18. The promise of "blessing" (v.17) is similar to 12:2. The increase of Abraham's "descendants" is similar to 13:16; 15:5; and 17:2. The view of "all nations" as enjoying and participating in Abraham's blessing (v.18) is similar to 12:3 and 18:18. The reference to Abraham's act of obedience as the basis of the promise is similar to 18:19.

NOTES

17 The expression "Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies" anticipates "May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies" in 24:60.

6. The Relatives of Abraham (22:20 – 24)

[20]Some time later Abraham was told, "Milcah is also a mother; she has
borne sons to your brother Nahor: [21]Uz the firstborn, Buz his brother,
Kemuel (the father of Aram), [22]Kesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlaph and Bethuel."
[23]Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. Milcah bore these eight sons to
Abraham's brother Nahor. [24]His concubine, whose name was Reumah, also
had sons: Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

COMMENTARY

20 – 24 Immediately after reiterating the promise of a great multitude of

descendants, the writer attaches a notice regarding the increase of the family that Abraham and Sarah left behind in their homeland. The central purpose of listing these names is to introduce into the narrative the source of the future bride of Isaac, Rebekah (v.23) and to show that she is of the lineage of Milcah, not of her concubine (v.24).

NOTE

23 The syntax W + X + QATAL with inverted word order and the fact that רִבְקָה (*ribqâ*, "Rebekah") is not counted in the total (שְׁמֹנָה אֵלֶּה, *šᵉmōnâ ʾēlleh*, "these eight") shows that this is an explanation inserted within the list anticipating the narrative of ch. 24 (cf. vv.15, 24).

7. Machpelah and Sarah's Death (23:1 – 20)

[1]Sarah lived to be a hundred and twenty-seven years old. [2]She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her.

[3]Then Abraham rose from beside his dead wife and spoke to the Hittites. He said, [4]"I am an alien and a stranger among you. Sell me some property for a burial site here so I can bury my dead."

[5]The Hittites replied to Abraham, [6]"Sir, listen to us. You are a mighty prince among us. Bury your dead in the choicest of our tombs. None of us will refuse you his tomb for burying your dead."

[7]Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites. [8]He said to them, "If you are willing to let me bury my dead, then listen to me and intercede with Ephron son of Zohar on my behalf [9]so he will sell me the cave of Machpelah, which belongs to him and is at the end of his field. Ask him to sell it to me for the full price as a burial site among you."

[10]Ephron the Hittite was sitting among his people and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all the Hittites who had come to the gate of his city. [11]"No, my lord," he said. "Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you in the presence of my people. Bury

your dead.”

12 Again Abraham bowed down before the people of the land 13 and he
said to Ephron in their hearing, “Listen to me, if you will. I will pay the
price of the field. Accept it from me so I can bury my dead there.”

14 Ephron answered Abraham, 15 “Listen to me, my lord; the land is worth
four hundred shekels of silver, but what is that between me and you? Bury
your dead.”

16 Abraham agreed to Ephron’s terms and weighed out for him the price
he had named in the hearing of the Hittites: four hundred shekels of silver,
according to the weight current among the merchants.

17 So Ephron’s field in Machpelah near Mamre — both the field and the
cave in it, and all the trees within the borders of the field — was deeded
18 to Abraham as his property in the presence of all the Hittites who had
come to the gate of the city. 19 Afterward Abraham buried his wife Sarah in
the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the
land of Canaan. 20 So the field and the cave in it were deeded to Abraham
by the Hittites as a burial site.

COMMENTARY

1 – 20 Sarah dies in Hebron, and Abraham comes there to mourn her death (v.2). Although the text is not clear, it appears that Abraham comes from Beersheba, where he has been dwelling at the close of ch. 22 (v.19).The point of ch. 23 is to show how Abraham comes to possess a parcel of land in Canaan. He buys a cave in which to bury his wife. Included with the cave is the large field with many trees. The chapter stresses that Abraham uses a fair process to purchase this property. The field and the cave become his responsibility and are used as an important burial site for the patriarchs and their wives. According to 49:30 – 32, Sarah and Abraham are buried in the cave, as well as Isaac, Rebekah, Leah, and Jacob (50:13).

If viewed from the perspective of God’s covenantal promises to Abraham, this narrative shows that God, not humanity, is the source of Abraham’s hope of blessing. Abraham will not seek wealth or ownership of land apart from God’s promises. The same purpose lies behind 33:19, which informs us that when Jacob returns to the land after his sojourn in the east, he also purchases a portion

of a field to pitch his tent. Wherever possible the writer seizes the opportunity to show that the patriarchs come to possess the land fairly and that it is a gift from God.

Another idea lying within this narrative can be seen from the perspective of the book of Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 32:6 – 15, on the eve of the Babylonian captivity, Jeremiah's trust in God's promise of the land is expressed in his purchase of a parcel of land. Though the people will soon be removed from the land in captivity, Jeremiah purchases a plot of ground because he is confident that they will one day return and enjoy the good land God has given them. The writer of Genesis appears to have a similar idea in mind in the picture of Abraham in ch. 23.

Abraham purchases only a portion of the entire land that will someday belong to his seed. In this small purchase is embodied Abraham's hope in God's promise. Similarly, Joseph's last request is that his bones be returned to the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (50:24). His request is carried out when the Israelites bury his bones in the parcel of land that Jacob purchased from the sons of Hamor (Jos 24:32).

NOTES

2 Both the ancient name for the city of Sarah's death - קִרְיַת אַרְבַּע (*qiryat ʾarbaʿ*, "Kiriath Arba") - and its more recent name - חֶבְרוֹן (*Ḥebrôn*, "Hebron") - are given, as in 35:27 (cf. Jos 14:15; 15:13, 54; Jdg 1:10). Elsewhere the narrative gives only the more recent name, Hebron (cf. 13:18b). Later in the narrative the place where Abraham buries Sarah - "the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre" - is also identified as Hebron (23:19). The narrative is clearly concerned to maintain a uniform location for these events. Hebron plays an important role in the later narratives of David, for it is there that David is first anointed king over Judah (2Sa 5:3).

17 The subject of וַיָּקָם (*wayyāqom*, "was deeded") is שְׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן (*śᵊdēh ʿeprôn*, "Ephron's field," as in v.20 and Lev 25:30) with the ל (l) marking the possessor - לְאַבְרָהָם (*lᵊʾabrāhām*, "to Abraham," v.18a). The expression means that Abraham is given possession of the land with all of its accompanying responsibilities (cf. Lev

25:30).

8. A Bride for Isaac (24:1 – 67)

a. Abraham's instructions (24:1 – 9)

[1]Abraham was now old and well advanced in years, and the LORD had
blessed him in every way. [2]He said to the chief servant in his household, the
one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh. [3]I want you
to swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you
will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among
whom I am living, [4]but will go to my country and my own relatives and get
a wife for my son Isaac."
[5]The servant asked him, "What if the woman is unwilling to come back
with me to this land? Shall I then take your son back to the country you
came from?"
[6]"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said.
[7]"The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's
household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on
oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land' —he will send his
angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. [8]If the
woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from
this oath of mine. Only do not take my son back there." [9]So the servant put
his hand under the thigh of his master Abraham and swore an oath to him
concerning this matter.

COMMENTARY

1 – 9 This story begins with the oath Abraham makes with his servant. Its point is to show Abraham's concern for the divine promise that is to be fulfilled through the descendants of Isaac. This is the promise of an "offspring," identified later (49:8 – 12) as a future king.

In this sense the story picks up from 21:1 the theme of Isaac, the promised

offspring. Though Isaac is a central figure in ch. 22, he is portrayed there only as the beloved son of Abraham. Abraham is the focus of that story; his faith is tested, and Isaac's role within that narrative is directed toward that end. The focus on Isaac as the one through whom Abraham's descendant will come lies at the center of ch. 24 and takes the reader back to the account of his birth in ch. 21 and to the announcement of his birth in ch. 18. Here at the end of the Abrahamic narratives, the writer returns to the themes that loomed large at the beginning — the promised descendant and the blessing.

This section also allows the writer once again to portray the faith of Abraham. The questions raised by the servant provide the occasion. What if the young woman does not want to return (v.5)? What then? As so many times before, Abraham's reply proves to be both prophetic (it anticipates the final outcome of the story) and thematic (it provides the central motive of the narrative): "The LORD, the God of heaven . . . will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there" (v.7).The key word in the narrative is *haqrēh* ("give [me] success," v.12), and the key idea is that of God's going before Abraham's servant to prepare his way. The primary means of getting this message across in the narrative lies in the words of the loquacious servant.

b. The servant's journey (24:10 – 27)

[10]Then the servant took ten of his master's camels and left, taking with him all kinds of good things from his master. He set out for Aram Naharaim and made his way to the town of Nahor. [11]He had the camels kneel down near the well outside the town; it was toward evening, the time the women go out to draw water.

[12]Then he prayed, "O LORD, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. [13]See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. [14]May it be that when I say to a girl, 'Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,' and she says, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too' — let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master."

[15]Before he had finished praying, Rebekah came out with her jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel son of Milcah, who was the wife of Abraham's brother Nahor. [16]The girl was very beautiful, a virgin; no man

had ever lain with her. She went down to the spring, filled her jar and came up again.

[17]The servant hurried to meet her and said, “Please give me a little water from your jar.”

[18]“Drink, my lord,” she said, and quickly lowered the jar to her hands and gave him a drink.

[19]After she had given him a drink, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking.” [20]So she quickly emptied her jar into the trough, ran back to the well to draw more water, and drew enough for all his camels. [21]Without saying a word, the man watched her closely to learn whether or not the LORD had made his journey successful.

[22]When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. [23]Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father’s house for us to spend the night?”

[24]She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milcah bore to Nahor.” [25]And she added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night.”

[26]Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, 27saying, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master’s relatives.”

COMMENTARY

10 – 27 The servant spells out specifically the nature of the sign he seeks from the Lord (vv.12 – 14). To add force to the picture of God’s preparing the way, the writer informs us, even before the servant has finished speaking, that the young girl in question has arrived on the scene (v.15a). The reader is given the background of the young girl as soon as she enters the picture (vv.15b – 16). While the servant himself must wait to find out her identity, the reader already knows she is Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah. Rebekah has been textually identified from 11:29 and 22:20.

The point here is to show from the start that the Lord has answered the servant’s prayer. We know this before the servant does. The writer must sacrifice

some of the narrative suspense for the sake of communicating this information but places more importance on the reader's sharing of the awareness that God is at work. Indeed, judging from the type of information given about the girl in v.16 (e.g., she is beautiful, she is a virgin, no man has lain with her), the writer leaves us in no doubt that this is the girl the servant has asked for and that God has indeed sent his messenger ahead to prepare the way. The rest of the story confirms what the writer has given away at the beginning — this is the girl. As he continues to recount the details that show this, it serves to underscore the extent to which the Lord has prepared this wife for Isaac.

What is unusual about this narrative, and also what makes it unusually long, is that even though we, the readers, know who the young girl is and what family she is from, we still must wait for the servant to find this out for himself. The reader's part in the story is to look on as the servant himself discovers who the girl is and how the Lord has prepared his way. The point of the narrative is not so much our discovery of what God has done but rather the servant's response to it. The writer gives due consideration to the Lord's role in these events.

NOTES

12 הִקְרָה (*haqrēh*, "give ... success," hiphil of קָרָה, *qārâ*, "to meet, happen"; GK 7936) is a word found in some texts stressing an aspect of divine guidance and help (e.g., Nu 11:23; Ru 2:3; Jer 32:23; cf. E. Jenni, TAZHAT, 2:684). In some contexts, it is true, this word appears to mean little more than "to chance upon" (see BDB); however, such contexts may still focus on divine guidance. Regarding Ruth 2:3, Hals says:

> The labeling of Ruth's meeting with Boaz as "chance" is nothing more than the author's way of saying that no human intent was involved. For Ruth and Boaz it was an accident, but not for God. . . . It is a kind of underplaying for effect. By calling this meeting an accident, the writer enables himself subtly to point out that even the "accidental" is directed by God. (Quoted in Jack M. Sasson, Ruth [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979], 44)

In the present passage יהוה (*yhwh*, "the LORD") is the subject of *haqrēh*, so "chance" is hardly adequate as a translation.

27 אָנֹכִי (*ʾānōkî*, "I") is the subject of a compound nominal clause (R. Meyer,

Hebraïsche Grammatik [Berlin: de Gruyter, n.d.], 3:13). There is no need to emend it to כִּי (*kî*, "for") as in the BHS apparatus.

REFLECTION

The writer is not content to leave the reader alone with his striking view of God's work. The servant's response demonstrates the only adequate response to God's guiding hand. Thus, in his character and response, we see the proper response to such divine events. Such divine preparation for the descendants of Abraham and the line of the blessing must be accompanied by the kind of appreciation seen in the servant: "Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD saying, 'Praise be to the LORD the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master' " (vv.26 – 27). Can our response be any less?

c. Rebekah (24:28 – 49)

[28]The girl ran and told her mother's household about these things. [29]Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring. [30]As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. [31]"Come, you who are blessed by the LORD," he said. "Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels."

[32]So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. [33]Then food was set before him, but he said, "I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say."

"Then tell us," Laban said.

[34]So he said,"I am Abraham's servant. [35]The LORD has blessed my master abundantly, and he has become wealthy. He has given him sheep and cattle, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and camels and donkeys. [36]My master's wife Sarah has borne him a son in her old age, and he has given him everything he owns. [37]And my master made me swear an oath, and said, 'You must not get a wife for my son from the daughters of

the Canaanites, in whose land I live, [38]but go to my father's family and to my own clan, and get a wife for my son.'

[39]"Then I asked my master, 'What if the woman will not come back with me?'

[40]"He replied, 'The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey a success, so that you can get a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's family. [41]Then, when you go to my clan, you will be released from my oath even if they refuse to give her to you — you will be released from my oath.'

[42]"When I came to the spring today, I said, 'O LORD, God of my master Abraham, if you will, please grant success to the journey on which I have come. [43]See, I am standing beside this spring; if a maiden comes out to draw water and I say to her, "Please let me drink a little water from your jar," [44]and if she says to me, "Drink, and I'll draw water for your camels too," let her be the one the LORD has chosen for my master's son.'

[45]"Before I finished praying in my heart, Rebekah came out, with her jar on her shoulder.

She went down to the spring and drew water, and I said to her, 'Please give me a drink.'

[46]"She quickly lowered her jar from her shoulder and said, 'Drink, and I'll water your camels too.' So I drank, and she watered the camels also.

[47]"I asked her, 'Whose daughter are you?'

"She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel son of Nahor, whom Milcah bore to him.'

"Then I put the ring in her nose and the bracelets on her arms, [48]and I bowed down and worshiped the LORD. I praised the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who had led me on the right road to get the granddaughter of my master's brother for his son. [49]Now if you will show kindness and faithfulness to my master, tell me; and if not, tell me, so I may know which way to turn."

COMMENTARY

28 – 49 Another striking feature of this story is the numerous repetitions of the story itself. After introducing Laban and his household (vv.29 – 33), the narrator has the servant retell his story (vv.34 – 49). But as with many repetitions in

biblical narrative, this retelling is not a mere repeating of the story. Rather, it reasserts the central points of the first narrative.

The point of this retelling becomes apparent in the way the servant adds to what was originally reported by Abraham (v.7). At the start of the story, we hear Abraham say, only in a general way, that God will send a messenger and that the servant will find a wife for Isaac. As the servant retells the story to Laban, however, he includes the notion that God will send "the angel" and adds that the angel will make his journey a success by gaining a wife for Isaac from his own family (v.40).As we overhear the servant recounting additional details, we see that the miracle of God's provision is even grander than that suggested in the initial narrative.

d. Rebekah's journey to Isaac (24:50 – 67)

[50]Laban and Bethuel answered, "This is from the LORD; we can say
nothing to you one way or the other. [51]Here is Rebekah; take her and go,
and let her become the wife of your master's son, as the LORD has
directed."
[52]When Abraham's servant heard what they said, he bowed down to the
ground before the LORD. [53]Then the servant brought out gold and silver
jewelry and articles of clothing and gave them to Rebekah; he also gave
costly gifts to her brother and to her mother. [54]Then he and the men who
were with him ate and drank and spent the night there. When they got up
the next morning, he said, "Send me on my way to my master."
[55]But her brother and her mother replied, "Let the girl remain with us ten
days or so; then you may go."
[56]But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has
granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my
master."
[57]Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." [58]So they
called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?"
"I will go," she said.
[59]So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and
Abraham's servant and his men. [60]And they blessed Rebekah and said to
her,
"Our sister, may you increase

to thousands upon thousands;
may your offspring possess
the gates of their enemies."
[61]Then Rebekah and her maids got ready and mounted their camels and went back with the man. So the servant took Rebekah and left.
[62]Now Isaac had come from Beer Lahai Roi, for he was living in the Negev. [63]He went out to the field one evening to meditate, and as he looked up, he saw camels approaching.
[64]Rebekah also looked up and saw Isaac. She got down from her camel [65]and asked the servant, "Who is that man in the field coming to meet us?"
"He is my master," the servant answered. So she took her veil and covered herself.
[66]Then the servant told Isaac all he had done. [67]Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he married Rebekah. So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

COMMENTARY

50 – 61 At the conclusion of the servant's account of the events, Laban and Bethuel have the opportunity to express their viewpoint. They too acknowledge that it is the Lord who has prepared the way for the servant to meet Rebekah. Thus the reader has been given three witnesses that these events have been the work of God: the narrator (vv.15 – 16), the servant (vv.26 – 27), and Laban (v.50). The final witness is Rebekah herself, who, against the wishes of her brother and mother, agrees to return with the servant to Isaac. The simplicity of Rebekah's response ("I will go," v.58) reveals the nature of her simple trust in the God of Abraham (cf. the identical response of Ruth in Ru 1:16).

62 – 67 Isaac enters the narrative for the first time just as the servant is bringing the young woman to him. Isaac and Rebekah both lift up their eyes and see the other at a distance (vv.63 – 64). The narrator and the readers know who it is that Isaac and Rebekah see, but Isaac and Rebekah do not. Notice how the narrator writes,"she saw Isaac"; yet it is not until the next verse that Rebekah herself learns that it is Isaac. Here is another example of the curious perspective of the reader throughout the narrative.We learn nothing new as the narrative progresses. It is only the characters that continue to discover the providential

ordering of the events; we the readers watch as the characters discover the greatness of God's providence.

Verse 66 shows that the writer is aware of just how long to continue telling the story. Stopping short of extending it unnecessarily, the author leaves us with the simple statement that the servant "told Isaac all he had done." The final remarks (v.67) show that God's guidance in the mundane areas of life is good for those who put their trust in him. When Isaac takes Rebekah as his wife, he loves her and is comforted with her after the death of his mother. Rebekah has taken Sarah's place in the line of the descendants of Abraham.

9. Abraham's Death (25:1 – 11)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 25 is a transition chapter. Abraham dies, and the blessing is renewed through Isaac. Ishmael passes from the scene, and the new generation —Jacob and Esau — is born.

> [1]Abraham took another wife, whose name was Keturah. [2]She bore him Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. [3]Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan; the descendants of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites and the Leummites. [4]The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.
>
> [5]Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. [6]But while he was still living, he gave gifts to the sons of his concubines and sent them away from his son Isaac to the land of the east.
>
> [7]Altogether, Abraham lived a hundred and seventy-five years. [8]Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people. [9]His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah near Mamre, in the field of Ephron son of Zohar the Hittite, [10]the field Abraham had bought from the Hittites. There Abraham was buried with his wife Sarah. [11]After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac, who then lived near Beer Lahai Roi.

COMMENTARY

1 – 6 The narrative appears to suggest that after the death of Sarah, Abraham takes another wife by the name Keturah (v.1). There is little basis in the Hebrew text for the translation, "Abraham had taken a wife" (NIV mg.), as though Keturah had been a wife or "concubine" of Abraham in his younger days at the same time he was married to Sarah. Some have suggested Keturah was one of the "concubines" mentioned in v.6, and hence these sons were born to Abraham and Keturah while Sarah was alive. Support for that interpretation may come from the Chronicler's reference to Keturah as a "concubine" (*pîlegeš*, 1Ch 1:32). Though Keturah is called a "concubine" in Chronicles, we should bear in mind that she is called a "wife" here. That would seem to preclude her being a concubine during the time Sarah was alive.

The picture that emerges of Abraham's life after the death of Sarah is that of a complete rejuvenation of the old man of the previous narratives. He continues to be rewarded with the blessing of many offspring. The writer, however, is careful to point out that none of these sons except Isaac have any share in the promised blessing: Abraham gives gifts to the other sons and sends them away, but he leaves "everything he owned to Isaac" (v.5). The focus on Isaac is reasserted in v.11, where the writer shows that God himself blesses Isaac after the death of Abraham.

7 – 10 Surprisingly little attention is given to the details of Abraham's death. The length of his life is recorded as 175 years (v.7). Such a long life connects him to the patriarchs listed in the previous chapters (cf. 11:32).The narrative adds the epitaph that Abraham died "at a good old age" (*bᵉśêbâ ṭôbâ*, v.8), which recalls the word of the Lord to Abraham in 15:15: "You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age [*bᵉśêbâ ṭôbâ*]."

The mention of Abraham's "good [*ṭôbâ*] old age" also serves as a contrast to Jacob's years, characterized in 47:9 as "few and difficult" (*rāʿîm*, lit., "bad"). Thus within the context of Genesis, Abraham and Jacob provide a narrative example of the contrast of "good" (*ṭôb*) and "bad" (*raʿ*), a theme begun in the first chapters of the book and carried through to the end (cf. 50:20). The emphasis of the narrative here lies in the fact that Abraham is buried in the field he purchased from Ephron the Hittite (vv.9 – 10). His final resting place is in the Promised Land.

11 Verse 11 opens a portion of Genesis that deals specifically with Isaac, and it gives this important but simple introduction: "After Abraham's death, God blessed his son Isaac." There are relatively few narratives devoted to the theme of "blessing" in the life of Isaac. Most of them are woven into the busy tapestry of ch. 26. All the more important, then, is this brief statement that God blessed Isaac. Such a reminder shows again the overarching purpose of the writer to draw out the line through which the divine blessing will come and to show it as a part of God's previously announced plan (cf. 17:21).

NOTES

1 The verb וַיֹּסֶף (*wayyōsep*) means "again" and should be translated "took another wife" (so the NIV). The past perfect ("had taken") is not appropriate for the WAYYIQTOL form, which as a rule expresses succession (Joüon, *Grammaire*, par. 118; cf. Ge 38:5; 1Sa 19:21; cf. BDB, 415). Keil, 261, says there is "no firm ground" for supposing that Abraham took Keturah as a wife after the death of Sarah; the presence of *wayyoìsep* contradicts that conclusion.

2 The descendants of מִדְיָן (*midyān*, "Midian") and מְדָן (*mᵉdān*, "Medan") play a further role in the Genesis narratives by taking part in the rescue of Joseph (cf. 37:28).

11 וַיְהִי אַחֲרֵי מוֹת אַבְרָהָם (*wayʰî ʾaḥᵃrê môṯ ʾabrāhām*, "After Abraham's death") is a common syntactical construct at the beginning of a large narrative segment (cf. Jos 1:1; Jdg 1:1).

III. The Account of Ishmael (25:12 – 18)

[12]This is the account of Abraham's son Ishmael, whom Sarah's maidservant, Hagar the Egyptian, bore to Abraham.

[13]These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, listed in the order of their birth: Nebaioth the firstborn of Ishmael, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, [14]Mishma, Dumah, Massa, [15]Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. [16]These were the sons of Ishmael, and these are the names of the twelve tribal rulers according to their settlements and camps. [17]Altogether, Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died, and he was gathered to his people. [18]His descendants settled in the area from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt, as you go toward Asshur. And they lived in hostility toward all their brothers.

COMMENTARY

12 – 18 At the opening of the stories about Isaac we find a final statement regarding the line of Ishmael (v.12). It consists of a genealogy of the twelve leaders of Ishmael's clan, a report of the length of his life, and a report of his death. Note that the descendants of Ishmael continue to play a part in the Genesis narratives (28:9; 36:3; 37:27 – 28; 39:1).

As with other lists of names throughout Genesis, the number twelve appears to be a deliberate attempt to set these individuals off as founders of a new and separate people. The mention of "twelve tribal rulers" (*šᵉnêm-ʿāśār nᵉśîʾim*) recalls the word of the Lord regarding the future of the line of Ish-mael from 17:20, where it was promised that he too would be blessed and that "twelve rulers" (*šᵉnêmʿāśār nᵉśîʾim*) would be born to him and become a great nation.

IV. The Account of Isaac (25:19 – 35:29)

A. The Birth of Jacob and Esau (25:19 – 28)

[19]This is the account of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac, [20]and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram and sister of Laban the Aramean.

[21]Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. [22]The babies jostled each other within her, and she said,"Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

[23]The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

[24]When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. [25]The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau. [26]After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob. Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

[27]The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was a quiet man, staying among the tents. [28]Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

COMMENTARY

19 The narratives that have the life of Isaac as their focus are introduced as "the account of Abraham's son Isaac." Almost immediately, however, the narratives turn out to be about the sons of Isaac rather than about Isaac himself. Isaac is an important link in the line of Abraham, but as an individual character

within the narratives, he plays a secondary role. Only in ch. 26 does the narrative turn specifically to him.

20 – 28 There are several similarities between the Isaac narratives and other patriarchal narratives.

Isaac, like Esau (26:34), is forty years old when he takes a wife (v.20). Like Sarah (11:30), Rebekah is barren. As Abraham prayed for Abimelech when the women in Gerar were barren (20:17), Isaac prays for his wife, Rebekah; the Lord answers, and she bears two sons. The concentration on the barrenness of both Sarah and Rebekah, as well as Rachel (29:31) and Leah (29:35), enables the writer to reiterate the theme that the blessing promised through the chosen seed of Abraham is not to be accomplished by mere human effort. The fulfillment of the promise is only possible because of God's intervention.

A central theme of the rest of Genesis — the struggle between brothers — is introduced in this brief account of the wrestling of the twins in Rebekah's womb. Conflict between brothers is not new here in Genesis. Already in ch. 4 the struggle between Cain and Abel foreshadows a series of similar conflicts within the book: the sons of Noah (9:20 – 27), Abraham and Lot (13:7 – 12), Isaac and Ishmael (21:9), Jacob and Laban (chs. 29 – 31), and Joseph and his brothers (chs. 37 – 50).This emphasis on "enmity" and struggle appears to grow out of God's statement: "I will put enmity between . . . your offspring and hers" (3:15).The author patiently waits till the end to express thematically the lesson behind these struggles, calling on the words of Joseph to his brothers: "You intended it to harm me, but God intended it for good" (50:20). Out of each struggle (and in spite of it), God's will is accomplished.

Another important motif is present in this account: "the older will serve the younger" (v.23). Again as far back as ch. 4, the narrative portrays God as choosing and approving the younger and the weaker as the one through whom the divine purposes will be accomplished and divine blessing brought about. The offering of Cain, the older brother, was rejected, whereas the offering of the younger brother, Abel, was accepted. The line of Seth, the still younger brother, was the chosen line (4:26 – 5:8); Isaac was chosen over his older brother Ishmael (17:18 – 19); Rachel was chosen over her older sister Leah (29:18); Joseph, the younger brother, was chosen over all the rest (37:3); Manasseh received the

blessing rather than Ephraim (48:12 – 20); and Judah was chosen over his older brothers (49:8).

The intention behind each of these "reversals" is the recurring theme of God's sovereign grace. The blessing is not a natural right, as a right of the firstborn son would have been. Rather, God's blessing is extended to those who have no other claim to it. They all receive what they do not deserve (cf. Mal 1:1 – 5; Ro 9:10 – 13).

NOTE

25 – 26 There is a wordplay in the names of both sons. "Esau" (עֵשָׂו, *ʿēśāw*) was "red" (אַדְמֹנִי, *ʾadmōnî*, which is a play on אֱדוֹם, *ʾĕdôm*, "Edom"; cf. v.30; 36:1), and his body was "hairy" (שָׂעִר, *śēʿār*), a play on the region where he settled, Mount Seir (שֵׂעִיר, *śēʿîr*). "Jacob" (יַעֲקֹב, *yaʿăqōb*) grasped the "heel" (עָקֵב, *ʿāqēb*) of Esau.

B. Selling the Birthright (25:29 – 34)

29 Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open
country, famished. 30 He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red
stew! I'm famished!" (That is why he was also called Edom.)
31 Jacob replied,"First sell me your birthright."
32 "Look, I am about to die," Esau said. "What good is the birthright to
me?"
33 But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling
his birthright to Jacob.
34 Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and
drank, and then got up and left.
So Esau despised his birthright.

COMMENTARY

29 – 34 The story of Esau's rejection of his birthright is purposefully attached

to the end of the narrative that introduces the motif of the older brother's serving the younger. It is a narrative example that God's choice of Jacob over Esau does not run contrary to the wishes of either brother. It is made clear from the narrative that Esau "despises" his birthright. Jacob, however, is portrayed as one who will go to great lengths to gain it.

The importance of the contrast between the two brothers can best be seen in the fact that the writer himself explicitly states the point of the narrative in the conclusion of the story: "So Esau despised his birthright" (v.34). Occasionally in Genesis we find a clear and forthright statement of the writer's own understanding of the story. We are left with no doubt that the writer sees in this story of Jacob's trickery a larger lesson: that Esau, though he has the right of the firstborn, does not value it over a small bowl of soup. Thus when in God's plan Esau loses his birthright and consequently his blessing, there is no injustice dealt him. The narrative has shown that he did not care about the birthright.

NOTES

30 There is a wordplay between "red stew" (אָדֹם, *ʾādōm*) and the name "Edom" (אֱדוֹם, *ʾĕdôm*), the nation that descended from Esau.

31 – 34 The term בְּכֹרָה (*bᵉkōrâ*, "birthright") occurs four times in these verses and few times elsewhere. In 27:36 Esau alludes to *bᵉkōrâ* mentioned here and makes a wordplay on the idea of God's "blessing" (בְּרָכָה, *bᵉrākâ*) as well as Jacob's name: "He has deceived [וַיַּעְקְבֵנִי (*wayyaʿqᵉbēnî*)] me these two times, and now he has taken my blessing [בִּרְכָתִי (*birkāṯî*)]").

C. Isaac and Abimelech (26:1 – 35)

OVERVIEW

There are several similarities between the events of this chapter and those in

the life of Abraham (12:10 – 20; 20:1 – 18). The writer is not only fully conscious of the similarities but also appears to use them to advance the theme of God's faithfulness to the promises. While the stories and narratives of this chapter appear at first glance to be only loosely related and to lack a clear guiding theme, when seen from the perspective of the life of Abraham ch. 26 shows a remarkable unity of structure and purpose.

Each of the brief narratives that make up ch. 26 portrays Isaac in a situation or circumstance that has a parallel in the life of Abraham. The writer shows how the whole of Isaac's life repeats the life of Abraham. The lesson conveyed is that God's faithfulness in the past can be counted on in the present and the future. What God has done for the fathers he will also do for the sons.

> [1]Now there was a famine in the land — besides the earlier famine of Abraham's time —and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. [2]The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. [3]Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. [4]I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, [5]because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws." [6]So Isaac stayed in Gerar.
>
> [7]When the men of that place asked him about his wife, he said, "She is my sister," because he was afraid to say, "She is my wife." He thought, "The men of this place might kill me on account of Rebekah, because she is beautiful."
>
> [8]When Isaac had been there a long time, Abimelech king of the Philistines looked down from a window and saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. [9]So Abimelech summoned Isaac and said, "She is really your wife! Why did you say, 'She is my sister'?"
>
> Isaac answered him, "Because I thought I might lose my life on account of her."
>
> [10]Then Abimelech said, "What is this you have done to us? One of the men might well have slept with your wife, and you would have brought guilt upon us."

[11]So Abimelech gave orders to all the people:“Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death.”

[12]Isaac planted crops in that land and the same year reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him. [13]The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until he became very wealthy. [14]He had so many flocks and herds and servants that the Philistines envied him. [15]So all the wells that his father’s servants had dug in the time of his father Abraham, the Philistines stopped up, filling them with earth.

[16]Then Abimelech said to Isaac, “Move away from us; you have become too powerful for us.”

[17]So Isaac moved away from there and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there. [18]Isaac reopened the wells that had been dug in the time of his father Abraham, which the Philistines had stopped up after Abraham died, and he gave them the same names his father had given them.

[19]Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and discovered a well of fresh water there. [20]But the herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen and said, “The water is ours!” So he named the well Esek, because they disputed with him. [21]Then they dug another well, but they quarreled over that one also; so he named it Sitnah. [22]He moved on from there and dug another well, and no one quarreled over it. He named it Rehoboth, saying, “Now the LORD has given us room and we will flourish in the land.”

[23]From there he went up to Beersheba. [24]That 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; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”

[25]Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD. There he pitched his tent, and there his servants dug a well.

[26]Meanwhile, Abimelech had come to him from Gerar, with Ahuzzath his personal adviser and Phicol the commander of his forces. [27]Isaac asked them, “Why have you come to me, since you were hostile to me and sent me away?”

[28]They answered, “We saw clearly that the LORD was with you; so we said, ‘There ought to be a sworn agreement between us’ — between us and you. Let us make a treaty with you [29]that you will do us no harm, just as we did not molest you but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. And now you are blessed by the LORD.”

[30]Isaac then made a feast for them, and they ate and drank. [31]Early the next morning the men swore an oath to each other. Then Isaac sent them on their way, and they left him in peace.

[32]That day Isaac’s servants came and told him about the well they had dug. They said, “We’ve found water!” [33]He called it Shibah, and to this day the name of the town has been Beersheba.

[34]ZWhen Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. [35]They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah.

COMMENTARY

1 This account opens with a reminder that the present famine is new. This is not the famine that forced Abraham to flee to Egypt (12:10). By including this reminder the writer calls attention to the connection between the two passages. God’s dealings with Abraham foreshadow his dealings with Isaac just as his dealings with the patriarchs in general foreshadow his ongoing ways with Israel (see comments on Ge 12:10 – 20).

At first we are told only that Isaac goes down to Gerar to Abimelech; but in the warning Isaac receives in the vision of v.2, the reader is informed that he is really on his way to Egypt. No explanation is given why he should not go to Egypt except that he is to “live in the land” (v.2). We are apparently to read this in light of the promise that “the land” is to be given to the “offspring” (seed) of Abraham. Thus, immediately following this word from the Lord, there is the first major reiteration of the Abrahamic covenant and of the promise that “the land”

is to be given to Isaac and his “offspring” (seed, v.3).

2 – 5 The Lord’s warning to Isaac that he should remain in the land becomes an occasion for a formal restatement of the blessing (vv.3 – 4). In the face of the impending famine, the Lord promises to be with Isaac, to bless him, and to bring about all that was promised to his father, Abraham. The same promise given to Abraham is given to Isaac. His seed will be great in number (cf. 12:2), the land will be his (12:7), and all the nations of the earth will be blessed in him (12:3).

The Lord then adds a remarkable note: Abraham “kept my requirements [*mišmartî*], my commands [*miṣwōtay*], my decrees [*ḥuqqôtay*] and my laws [*wᵉtôrōtāy*]’” (v.5). It is remarkable that this is precisely the way in which obedience to the Sinaitic covenant is expressed in Deuteronomy 11:1: “Love the LORD your God and keep his requirements [*mišmartô*], his decrees [*ḥuqqôtāyw*], his laws [*miš*pātāyw] and his commands [*miṣwōtāyw*]” (cf. also Dt 4:40; 8:11; 26:17; 1Ki 2:3; 6:12; 8:58). Did Abraham know the law? If so, how? If not, what do the Lord’s words mean? These narratives do not suggest that Abraham had a copy of the laws of the Pentateuch or that he knew of any oral tradition. It thus seems unlikely that the writer expects the reader to understand the Lord’s words in such a way.

A partial resolution of the problem of how Abraham knew the Sinaitic laws lies in the writer’s portrayal of Abraham throughout the book. We have already seen that at several points Abraham acts in accordance with the law, particularly Deuteronomy; yet there is no assumption there that he knew the actual law. In ch. 14, when Abraham fought with the kings who were from a far country, his actions follow closely the stipulations of Deuteronomy 20.

The same can be said in that same chapter regarding his treatment of the nations who were nearby (e.g., the king of Sodom); he obeyed the law from the heart, much as the ideal picture given in Deuteronomy 30:6 would have it. Thus Abraham is an example of one who shows the law written on his heart (Jer 31:33). He is the writer’s ultimate example of true obedience to the law, the one about whom the Lord can say, “Abraham obeyed me” (v.5). Thus, by presenting Abraham as an example of “keeping the law,” the writer shows the nature of the relationship between the law and faith. Abraham, a man who lived by faith, is described as one who kept the law.

The view of faith and the law reflected in this narrative is that of Deuteronomy 30:11, 14, where Moses said, “What I am commanding you [*hammiṣwâ hazzō'ṭ*, lit., ‘this command’] is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach . . . it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.” It is also in keeping with the apostle Paul’s understanding of Deuteronomy 30 in Romans 10, where he writes that the “word” that Moses says is “in your heart,” is “the word of faith we are proclaiming” (Ro 10:8).

6 – 11 There are numerous similarities between Isaac and Abraham in this section. Just as Abraham “stayed in Gerar” (20:1), so does Isaac (26:6). Just as Abraham devised a scheme with his wife Sarah, calling her his sister (12:13; 20:2), so does Isaac with Rebekah (26:7). Just as Abraham was rebuked by the Philistine king Abimelech for the great shame he might have brought on his people (20:9), so also is Isaac (26:10). Such similarities can hardly be coincidental. The writer portrays to the reader that the lives of the two patriarchs run a remarkably similar course.

There are, however, some notable differences. Unlike in the events of the life of Abraham (ch. 20), where God warned Abimelech against touching (*lingōa'*) Abraham’s wife (20:6), here Abimelech himself forbids anyone to touch (*hannōgēa'*, 26:11; NIV, “molest”) Isaac’s wife. Likewise, God protected Abraham’s wife with the threat of capital punishment (*môt tāmût*, lit., “will surely die”; 20:7), but here Abimelech says that anyone who molests Isaac or his wife “shall surely be put to death” (*môt yûmāt*, 26:11).

In light of the numerous similarities between the two narratives, why is there such a change in perspective on the two similar events? What is the author getting at? His intention is perhaps best discovered by observing the effect these differences have on our understanding of the characters themselves. In ch. 20, for example, Abimelech is said to have been “pure of heart” (20:6; NIV, “clear con-science”). In ch. 26 his actions alone show that his heart was right. In ch. 26 Abimelech has no need of being warned in the dream, as in ch. 20. All that is necessary is the discovery that Rebekah is not Isaac’s sister (v.8); that is enough for Abimelech to fear that a great shame (,*afÊ*.a*fÊm*, v.10; NIV, “guilt”) may come upon his people.

Clearly in contrast to ch. 20, the picture of the Philistine king that emerges in

ch. 26 is that of a righteous, even pious, Gentile, one who knows and does what is right and, by contrast, shows Isaac to be less righ teous than he. Abimelech the righteous Gentile stands in contrast to Isaac, who attempts to disguise his wife as his sister. Such a view of Abraham's neighboring nations is a far cry from the picture of Sodom and Gomorrah and of Lot and his daughters in ch. 19. What this means is that at this point in the book the writer's overall perspective on Abraham and the nations begins to take on a somewhat broader picture. While the nations in many respects are still deserving of judgment, they are also viewed as righteous and capable of entering into covenant with God's chosen "seed" (21:27, 32; 26:28).

12 – 13 Just as Abraham prospered while sojourning among the Gentiles (12:16; 20:14), so now Isaac prospers while sojourning with Abimelech. Lest we fail to see the significance of Isaac's prosperity, by way of explanation the writer adds: "the LORD blessed him" (*wayᵉbārᵉkēhû yhwh*). This is the second time the writer has spoken of God's blessing of Isaac. The repetition of the statement serves to underscore the connection between Isaac's prosperity and God's promise to Abraham in ch. 12: "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you [*waᵓbārekᵉkā*]" (v.2). What God had promised to Abraham is already being fulfilled through Isaac.

14 – 22 Just as Abraham's prosperity became an occasion for the conflict between his shepherds and those of Lot (13:5 – 7), so also Isaac's wealth angers the Philistines; they become jealous, and contention arises. Once again the writer compares Abraham and Lot (ch. 13), and Isaac and Abimelech. The "herdsmen [*rōʿē*] of Gerar quarreled [*wayyārîbû*] with Isaac's herdsmen [*rōʿē*]" (v.20) just as Abraham's herdsmen quarreled with Lot's. These two narratives use virtually the same terms of the contention (*wayᵉhî-rîb*; NIV, "And quarreling arose," 13:7).

As the name given to the well — "Rehoboth" (i.e., "wide open spaces") — shows, there is a gradual resolution of the conflict as Isaac moved progressively farther away from the Philistines and digs new wells. After experiencing a much-desired absence of conflict at Rehoboth, Isaac says, "We will flourish in the land" (*ûpārînû bāᵓāreṣ*, v.22). Their words are an echo of the terms of the original blessing in 1:28: "Be fruitful [*pᵉrû*] . . . and fill the earth [*hāᵓāreṣ*]."

The depiction of Isaac in this narrative suggests that he, like Abraham, enjoys

the firstfruits of God's blessing — even though it results in and takes place amid bitter contention with those among whom they live. Clearly the author intends to point to the patriarchs as those whose lives most clearly picture the kind of blessing God wants his people, and humanity as a whole, to enjoy. At the same time these narratives point to some bitter realities of even the ancient fathers. They do not enjoy the full blessing. They too must face adversity; but they trust God, and he blesses them amid the conflict.

23 – 25 The Lord spoke to Abraham after he separated from Lot with a renewal of the promise of land and great prosperity (13:14 – 17). In the same way with Isaac, as he returns to Beersheba, the Lord appears and renews the promise (26:23 – 24). For a third time it is said that the Lord will bless (*ûbēraktîkā*, vv.2, 12) Isaac. Like his father, Abraham (12:7; 13:3 – 4), Isaac responds by building an altar and worshiping God (v.25).

26 – 31 After his interacton with Abraham, Abimelech and his people came to Abraham and acknowledged to him, "God is with you" (21:22). They sought to make a covenant with him. In the same way, Abimelech comes to Isaac acknowledging that "the LORD [is] with you" and seeks to enter a covenant (26:28). Isaac, like Abraham, is a source of blessing to the nations. Isaac, like Abraham, trusts God and lives "in peace" (*bᵉšālôm*) with his neighbors (v.31).

32 – 33 As a final picture of Isaac in this brief collage of images, the writer concludes with an account of the news of a new well. The point of this brief report can be seen in the writer's focus on its being made "on the same day" (*bayyôm hahûʾ*, v.32; NIV, "that day") as Isaac made peace with his neighbors. In this way the writer associates the name of the city, "Beersheba" (*bᵉʾēr šebaʿ*, lit., "well of the seven/oath"; cf. 21:31), with the "oath" made that day (*wayyiššābᵉʿû*, v.31; NIV, "[they] swore an oath").

34 – 35 At first glance it appears that this short notice of Esau's marriage to two Hittite women plays a relatively insignificant role within the larger context; however, when read as an introduction to ch. 27, this notice casts a much different light on the events of that chapter. As it stands, immediately before the account of Jacob's stolen blessing (in ch. 27), we learn that Esau, from whom Jacob has stolen the blessing, has married Hittite women and that they are a source of grief to both Isaac and Rebekah. These verses serve as a kind of

explanatory background to the central event of ch. 27, the blessing of Jacob. The notices, while not justifying the stolen blessing, at least put it into perspective (see below).

NOTES

1 The phrase "besides the . . . famine of Abraham's time" refers to 12:10 and shows that the author is interested in the larger sections of these narratives and their interconnectedness.

The *dagesh* in אֲבִימֶלֶךְ (*ʾăbîmmelek*, "Abimelech"; found only in some MSS) may be an attempt to distinguish this king from the אֲבִימֶלֶךְ (*ʾăbîmelek*, "Abimelech") in ch. 20. Throughout the remainder of the chapter, however, the name is ,*ʾăbîmelek* (without the *dagesh*).

8 There is a wordplay between the name "Isaac" (יִצְחָק, *yiṣḥāq*, whose name means "laughing"), and "caressing" (מְצַחֵק, *mᵉṣaḥēq*); see comment on 18:10 – 12.

15 The mention of wells dug by Abraham refers to 21:25 – 30, where Abraham made a contract with Abimelech regarding a well he had dug. In that passage, the name of the place (בְּאֵר שָׁבַע, *bᵉʾēr šābaʿ*, "Beersheba") is derived from the "seven" (שֶׁבַע, *šebaʿ* lambs that Abraham gave to Abimelech as a witness to the contract. In the present passage, the name *bᵉʾēr šābaʿ* (v.23) is derived from the name of the last well (שִׁבְעָה, *šibʿâ*, "Shibah," v.33), which is itself derived from the fact that the two men took an oath (וַיִּשָּׁבְעוּ, *wayyiššābᵉʿû*,

D. The Stolen Blessing (27:1 – 40)

OVERVIEW

In this narrative the writer goes to considerable lengths both to convey an important lesson and to tell an interesting and suspenseful story. What is particularly noticeable in the story is the way its characters are developed. As we

will see, at several points along the way the author provides helpful characterizations of these characters to enable the reader to see behind the events to the underlying story that is developing.

In telling a good story, however, the writer has not lost sight of his primary purpose, which is to maintain and develop the themes of Genesis. At the climactic edge of the central portion of the story, as the disheartened father, Isaac, and the rejected son, Esau, reflect on Jacob's successful plan to steal the blessing, the writer allows their words of dismay and anger to express one of the central themes of the story. Isaac says, "I blessed him — and indeed he will be blessed" (v.33); Esau replies, "He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" (v.36). In the end, Jacob owns the family's birthright, which rightfully belonged to Esau. Also Jacob, instead of Esau, receives their father's blessing. What was promised at the beginning of the story is now an established fact: "The older will serve the younger" (25:23).

[1]When Isaac was old and his eyes were so weak that he could no longer see, he called for Esau his older son and said to him,"My son."

"Here I am," he answered.

[2]Isaac said, "I am now an old man and don't know the day of my death. [3]Now then, get your weapons — your quiver and bow — and go out to the open country to hunt some wild game for me. [4]Prepare me the kind of tasty food I like and bring it to me to eat, so that I may give you my blessing before I die."

[5]Now Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau left for the open country to hunt game and bring it back, [6]Rebekah said to her son Jacob, "Look, I overheard your father say to your brother Esau, [7]'Bring me some game and prepare me some tasty food to eat, so that I may give you my blessing in the presence of the LORD before I die.' [8]Now, my son, listen carefully and do what I tell you: [9]Go out to the flock and bring me two choice young goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, just the way he likes it. [10]Then take it to your father to eat, so that he may give you his blessing before he dies."

[11]Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, "But my brother Esau is a hairy man, and I'm a man with smooth skin. [12]What if my father touches me? I would appear to be tricking him and would bring down a curse on myself rather than a blessing."

13 His mother said to him, “My son, let the curse fall on me. Just do what
I say; go and get them for me.”
14 So he went and got them and brought them to his mother, and she
prepared some tasty food, just the way his father liked it. 15 Then Rebekah
took the best clothes of Esau her older son, which she had in the house, and
put them on her younger son Jacob. 16 She also covered his hands and the
smooth part of his neck with the goatskins. 17 Then she handed to her son
Jacob the tasty food and the bread she had made.
18 He went to his father and said, “My father.”
“Yes, my son,” he answered. “Who is it?”
19 Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you
told me. Please sit up and eat some of my game so that you may give me
your blessing.”
20 Isaac asked his son, “How did you find it so quickly, my son?”
“The LORD your God gave me success,” he replied.
21 Then Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you, my son, to
know whether you really are my son Esau or not.”
22 Jacob went close to his father Isaac, who touched him and said, “The
voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” 23 He did
not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like those of his brother Esau;
so he blessed him. 24 “Are you really my son Esau?” he asked.
“I am,” he replied.
25 Then he said, “My son, bring me some of your game to eat, so that I
may give you my blessing.”
Jacob brought it to him and he ate; and he brought some wine and he
drank. 26 Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come here, my son, and kiss
me.”
27 So he went to him and kissed him. When Isaac caught the smell of his
clothes, he blessed him and said,
“Ah, the smell of my son
is like the smell of a field
that the LORD has blessed.
28 May God give you of heaven’s dew
and of earth’s richness —
an abundance of grain and new wine.
29 May nations serve you

and peoples bow down to you.
Be lord over your brothers,
and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.
May those who curse you be cursed
and those who bless you be blessed."

30 After Isaac finished blessing him and Jacob had scarcely left his father's presence, his brother Esau came in from hunting. 31 He too prepared some tasty food and brought it to his father. Then he said to him, "My father, sit up and eat some of my game, so that you may give me your blessing."

32 His father Isaac asked him, "Who are you?" "I am your son," he answered, "your firstborn, Esau."

33 Isaac trembled violently and said, "Who was it, then, that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it just before you came and I blessed him — and indeed he will be blessed!"

34 When Esau heard his father's words, he burst out with a loud and bitter cry and said to his father, "Bless me — me too, my father!"

35 But he said, "Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing."

36 Esau said, "Isn't he rightly named Jacob? He has deceived me these two times: He took my birthright, and now he's taken my blessing!" Then he asked, "Haven't you reserved any blessing for me?"

37 Isaac answered Esau, "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine. So what can I possibly do for you, my son?"

38 Esau said to his father, "Do you have only one blessing, my father? Bless me too, my father!" Then Esau wept aloud.

39 His father Isaac answered him,
"Your dwelling will be
away from the earth's richness,
away from the dew of heaven above.
40 You will live by the sword
and you will serve your brother.
But when you grow restless,
you will throw his yoke
from off your neck."

COMMENTARY

1 – 26 In this story the writer pays close attention to those elements that heighten the suspense and the deception of Jacob. In doing so he demonstrates that Jacob's name, which means "the deceiver" (cf. v.36: *wayyaʾqᵉbēnî*, "he has deceived me"), carries the theme of the narrative. This is only one of several stories that bring out this aspect of Jacob's character.

Isaac is depicted as too old and too blind to distinguish between his two sons. In some respects the writer's drawing out of these details may be an attempt to ameliorate Isaac's culpability in the story. However, Isaac's insistence on a "good meal" before the blessing recalls all too clearly Esau's own trading of the birthright for a pot of stew and thus casts Isaac in a similar role to that of Esau. The purpose of informing the reader of Isaac's blindness may have been to make the story more believable and, consequently, more suspenseful. If Isaac is old and blind, the events of the story make sense and the suspense in the story itself is real.

The point of giving the reader such information at the beginning of the story is to ensure that the success of the plan is not settled beforehand. The writer's interest in a truly suspenseful story is carried right to the end, where Jacob is shown leaving "at the same moment as" (cf. v.30) his brother Esau returns from the hunt — he doesn't have a moment to spare. The plan is in danger of failure right to the end.

27 – 29 As the story has been careful to stress throughout, the goal of Jacob's plan has been to wrestle the blessing from Isaac. Though Isaac does not appear completely convinced that he has the right son, in the end he does bless Jacob (*wayʿbārᵉkēhû*, lit., "he blessed him"; v.27). This theme of "blessing" within this immediate story points to the wider relationship of this narrative both to what precedes and to what follows. The promise to Abraham (12:2 – 3) is alluded to in Jacob's final words of blessing: "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed" (v.29; cf. 12:3). Isaac's blessing foreshadows Jacob's later prophecy of the kingship of the house of Judah: "Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you" (cf. 49:8).

Thus the words of Isaac are a crucial link in the development of the theme of the blessing of the "seed" of Abraham. In what may appear only as a selfish

attempt to steal his brother's blessing by stealth, Jacob's daring scheme turns out to be a link in the chain connecting the blessing of the "seed" of Abraham with the rise of the kingship in the house of Judah.

The close ties between Isaac's blessing of Jacob and the promise of a king in the poetry of Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 33 are evidence of a much larger strategy that identifies the "seed" of Abraham in the promise narratives of Genesis (chs. 12 – 50) with the poetic promise of an individual king who will reign "in the last days" (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29). Not only are there numerous cross-references between the major poems in the Pentatuech, but there are also further ties between these poems and the promise narratives in Genesis.

Isaac's blessing in 27:29, for example, specifically cites the blessing of Abraham in 12:3, "May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed" (cf. also Ge 49:9; Nu 24:9; Dt 33:7).

There is general agreement among the commentaries that the citations such as those of Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 establish an intentional connection between all the major poems and the promise narratives in the Pentateuch. That connection lies at the highest thematic level within the Pentateuch. It is important to note that at that level this link identifies Abraham's "seed" (*zera*ʿ) in the promise narratives with the king of Numbers 24.

The fact that Numbers 24 quotes the Genesis "promise narratives" (Ge 27:29) much like a modern author would quote from a printed book suggests a sophisticated level of innertextuality within the compositional strategy of the Pentateuch. Keil (*Numbers*, 191) accepted the notion that the quotation of Genesis 27 in Numbers 24 was an extension of the larger compositional strategy linking Jacob's blessing in Genesis 27 to the blessing of Abraham's seed in Genesis 12:3. For much the same reason Procksch, 163, also acknowledged that the individual addressed in 27:29 is intentionally identified as the future recipient of the blessing of Abraham in 12:3. In each case, these scholars identified the individual king in these texts as the future king of Balaam's vision.

It is true, of course, that at numerous points within the promise narratives the identity of the "seed" (*zera*ʿ) of Abraham is understood collectively. But that is not

the whole truth. We consistently see in these texts an intentional connection between the poetic texts and the promise narratives. The author of the Pentateuch appears to be moving decisively away from a collective reading of the promise narratives and toward an *individual* "seed of Abraham." The quotation of Genesis 27:29 by Numbers 24:9b intentionally identifies the *individual* "king" of Balaam's oracle with the "seed" of Abraham. The king foreseen by Balaam is the individual "seed" of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed.

In our day, with its increasing awareness of composition and textual strategies, these "learned quotations" and literary connections cannot be ignored. Within the structure of the Pentateuch the poems are the author's last and most important word regarding the message of these five books (see the (Introduction). The texts and connections we have briefly noted clearly envision an individual king as the focus of the patriarchal promise, the "seed of Abraham."

30 – 40 The reverse side of the blessing of Jacob is the disappointment and anger of Esau. There is no attempt in this narrative to revel in Esau's misfortune. He is presented as a tragic figure, a victim of a brother who is more resourceful and daring than he. Upon hearing of his misfortune, "he burst out with a loud and bitter cry" (v.34); and immediately his words turn the reader's attention back to the events of 25:21 – 34 and his loss of the birthright: "He has deceived me these two times: He took [*lāqāḥ*] my birthright [*bᵉkōrāṯ*], and now he's taken [*lāqaḥ*] my blessing [*birkaṯ*]!" (v.36). The chiastic structure of this last remark in the Hebrew text (X + [*lāqāḥ*] // [*lāqaḥ*] + X) as well as the wordplay between "birthright" and "blessing" (*bᵉkōrāṯ // birkāṯ*) suggests the writer intends Esau's remarks as a concise summary of the sense of the narrative thus far. Esau has lost everything, and Jacob has gained all.

Within the narrative, Isaac recounts the main points of the blessing a second time: "I have made him lord over you and have made all his relatives his servants, and I have sustained him with grain and new wine" (v.37). This underscores the fact that Isaac has blessed Jacob rather than Esau. Finally, to a weeping Esau Isaac answers his pleas for a blessing with a third reiteration of the central point of Jacob's blessing: "You will serve your brother" (v.40).

The point of these reiterations and characterizations of the blessing underscores their irrevocability and hence the certainty of their fulfillment. By showing that the blessing is irrevocable even by the father who gave the blessing, the writer underscores that its accomplishment is out of human hands; it will surely come to pass just as it was given.

NOTES

2 – 17 The central word of this story is בֶּרֶךְ (*bĕrēk,* just as in 25:27 – 34 the central word was בְּכֹרָה (*bᵉkōrâ,* "birthright"). The theme of the two stories is the same; and the two stories are linked by the words of Esau, which make a clear association between *bᵉkōrâ* and *bᵉrākâ* (v.36). Jacob has taken both his blessing (*bᵉrākâ*) and his birthright (*bᵉkōrâ*).

20 Jacob's use of הִקְרָה (*hiqrâ,* "[the LORD] gave success," as in 24:12) appears intended to reveal, albeit ironically, the ultimate purpose behind these events: the LORD is behind all the events of these stories. As in the case of Esau at the close of this story (see note on v.36), Jacob's words express an underlying theme that links the story to the themes in the book as a whole (cf. 50:20).

36 Esau's statement that Jacob has deceived him "these two times" (פַּעֲמַיִם, *paᶜᵉmayim*) is part of a larger theme in the Genesis narratives that is stated expressly by Joseph in 41:32: "The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh twice (פַּעֲמַיִם, *paᶜᵉmayim*) NIV, 'in two forms'] is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon." Thus Esau's words play an important role in linking this story to the major themes of the book.

E. Jacob's Flight from Beersheba (27:41 – 28:5)

41 Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." 42 When Rebekah was told what her older son Esau had said, she sent for her younger son Jacob and said to him, "Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. 43 Now then, my son, do what I say: Flee at once to my brother Laban

in Haran. [44]Stay with him for a while until your brother's fury subsides. [45]When your brother is no longer angry with you and forgets what you did to him, I'll send word for you to come back from there. Why should I lose both of you in one day?"

[46]Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living."

[28:1]So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him:"Do not marry a Canaanite woman. [2]Go at once to Paddan Aram, to the house of your mother's father Bethuel. Take a wife for yourself there, from among the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother. [3]May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and increase your numbers until you become a community of peoples. [4]May he give you and your descendants the blessing given to Abraham, so that you may take possession of the land where you now live as an alien, the land God gave to Abraham." [5]Then Isaac sent Jacob on his way, and he went to Paddan Aram, to Laban son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, who was the mother of Jacob and Esau.

COMMENTARY

27:41 – 28:5 Jacob's scheme not only results in his obtaining the blessing meant for Esau, it also becomes the occasion for Jacob's journey to the house of Laban in search of a wife. The picture of Esau at the conclusion of this story is that of a bitter, spiteful brother and son. He makes plans to kill Jacob (v.41). Again it is Rebekah who thwarts the plans by sending Jacob back to her homeland to find a wife (vv.42 – 45).

As with many of the narratives of Genesis, Isaac's words of blessing to the departing Jacob anticipate the eventual outcome of the story: Jacob will visit Laban "for a while," Esau's anger will subside, and Jacob will find a wife and return home with "a community of peoples" (28:1 – 3). Within Isaac's farewell blessing is a final reiteration of the central theme of the preceding narrative: the blessing of Abraham will rest on the family of Jacob. The promises of Abraham and of Isaac are now identified as the promises of Jacob.

NOTE

27:44 Notice how Rebekah's words here ("Stay with him a few days") foreshadow and anticipate the events of the following narrative. Compare 29:14 ("[and he] stayed with him for a whole month") and 29:20 ("only a few days").

F. Esau's Bitterness (28:6 – 9)

6 Now Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and had sent him to
Paddan Aram to take a wife from there, and that when he blessed him he
commanded him, "Do not marry a Canaanite woman," 7 and that Jacob had
obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram. 8 Esau then
realized how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac; 9 so
he went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebaioth and
daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, in addition to the wives he already
had.

COMMENTARY

6 – 9 The narrative of the previous section continues. The final picture of Esau in this narrative is that of a bitter son seeking to spite his parents through deliberate disobedience. The writer's purpose, however, is not to dwell on Esau's bitterness but to prepare the reader for the events that lie ahead and to tie this narrative to that which has preceded.

Esau was a bitter man when Jacob left; but, as Rebekah said (27:45), by the time Jacob returned, Esau would have changed. The biblical narrative does indeed highlight the changing relationship between the two brothers. Though at first Esau is angry, in the end, when Jacob does return, Esau "ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept" (33:4). The brothers are reconciled, and Esau partakes of the blessing (*birkāt*; lit., "my present") that Jacob received (33:11).

Such a view of the reconciliation between Jacob and Esau, Israel and Edom, is

an important element in the future hope of the later prophetic books (cf. Am 9:12/Ac 15:17). It is a picture of the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:3). Such a view is firmly rooted in the theological structure of the present narrative.

In the marriage of Esau to the daughter of Ish-mael (28:9), there is a reminder that the promised offspring of Abraham was determined not by the will of man but ultimately by the will of God. The families of the two "older" sons (Ishmael and Esau) have found God's blessing (17:20; 33:10) and are united in the marriage.

G. Jacob at Bethel (28:10 – 22)

10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. 11 When he reached a
certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one
of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. 12 He had
a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top
reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending
on it. 13 There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the
God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your
descendants the land on which you are lying. 14 Your descendants will be
like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east,
to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through
you and your offspring. 15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever
you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I
have done what I have promised you."

16 When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in
this place, and I was not aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "How
awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the
gate of heaven."

18 Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his
head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it. 19 He called that
place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz.

20 Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will
watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and

clothes to wear [21]so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God 22and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth."

COMMENTARY

10 – 22 Jacob, like Abraham (15:1), receives a confirmation of the promised blessing while asleep at night (cf. 15:12; 28:11). Abraham received God's word "in a vision" (*bammaḥᵃzeh*, 15:1), and Jacob sees the Lord in "a dream" (*wayyaḥᵃlōm*, v.12).

In both narratives a divine confirmation is given regarding the establishment of the covenant. The viewpoint of both chapters turns to the future "exile" of Abraham's descendants and the promise of a "return." Abraham's vision looked ahead to the sojourn of God's people in Egypt and also to the Lord's deliverance in the exodus. Jacob's dream looks ahead to his sojourn in Haran and to his eventual return by the Lord. With both, God promises that he will not forsake his people and will return them to their home. Just as Abraham's vision anticipated narratives from the latter part of the Pentateuch (see comments on 12:10 – 13:4), so Jacob's vision anticipates events that come in the next several chapters.

The purpose of this account of Jacob's dream is to show that in the events of the narratives that follow, we are to see a fulfillment of the promise made to Jacob: "I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land" (v.15). The Lord's words become the guiding principle governing for those events. Thus, when Jacob returns from Laban's house after many years, he returns to Bethel, where God renews the promises. Just as Jacob erects a "pillar" (*maṣṣēbâ*) at the outset of his journey and then names the place "Bethel" (28:18 – 19), so also when he returns he will erect another "pillar" (*maṣṣēbâ*) and name the place "Bethel" (35:14 – 15). At both ends of the narratives the writer reminds us that God is with Jacob in all that he does and is faithful to his promises.

H. Jacob and Rachel (29:1 – 14a)

[1]Then Jacob continued on his journey and came to the land of the eastern

peoples.

[2]There he saw a well in the field, with three flocks of sheep lying near it because the flocks were watered from that well. The stone over the mouth of the well was large. [3]When all the flocks were gathered there, the shepherds would roll the stone away from the well's mouth and water the sheep. Then they would return the stone to its place over the mouth of the well.

[4]Jacob asked the shepherds,"My brothers, where are you from?"

"We're from Haran," they replied.

[5]He said to them, "Do you know Laban, Nahor's grandson?"

"Yes, we know him," they answered.

[6]Then Jacob asked them, "Is he well?"

"Yes, he is," they said, "and here comes his daughter Rachel with the sheep."

[7]"Look," he said, "the sun is still high; it is not time for the flocks to be gathered. Water the sheep and take them back to pasture."

[8]"We can't," they replied,"until all the flocks are gathered and the stone has been rolled away from the mouth of the well. Then we will water the sheep."

[9]While he was still talking with them, Rachel came with her father's sheep, for she was a shepherdess. [10]When Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother's brother, and Laban's sheep, he went over and rolled the stone away from the mouth of the well and watered his uncle's sheep. [11]Then Jacob kissed Rachel and began to weep aloud. [12]He had told Rachel that he was a relative of her father and a son of Rebekah. So she ran and told her father.

[13]As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob, his sister's son, he hurried to meet him.

He embraced him and kissed him and brought him to his home, and there Jacob told him all these things. [14]Then Laban said to him, "You are my own flesh and blood."

COMMENTARY

1 – 14a In keeping with the depiction of Jacob's sojourn as an exile in Haran, the writer opens the account with the words, "Jacob continued on his journey

and came to the land of the eastern peoples" (v.1; see comments on 2:8). The account of his journey to find a wife is similar to the journey of Abraham's servant who sought a wife for Isaac (Ge 24). In ch. 24 the writer used the words of the servant to guide the narrative and to show that it was God alone who directed the servant to the right young woman for Isaac. In this chapter Jacob is relatively silent. He does not reflect on God's guidance or on the Lord's promise to be with him wherever he goes (28:15). It is Jacob's actions, not his words, that tell the story of God's help and guidance. As with the servant in ch. 24, God directs Jacob to the well where Rachel waters her flocks.

One gets the impression early in the story that Jacob is about to do a mighty deed because of the special care with which the writer describes the size of the rock covering the well and the number of shepherds already on hand. Only when all the shepherds are present are the men able to lift the rock from the well and water the flocks (vv.3, 8); the rock is too big for one man (v.2). When Jacob sees Rachel, however, and the shepherds identify her as the daughter of Laban, he single-handedly removes the rock and waters her sheep (v.10).

Then in a great show of emotion, Jacob kisses Rachel and cries out loudly (v.11). Clearly the writer wants us to see in Jacob's emotional response that, even though he does not say it specifically as Abraham's servant had done (24:27), Jacob sees in these circumstances the guiding hand of God. Jacob sees what Abraham's servant saw: the hand of God in the many events that have accompanied him on his journey. As for Jacob's physical strength, it is apparently to be understood as further evidence that God is with Jacob and has not forsaken the promises (28:15; cf. 24:27). Jacob has help.

Throughout the narratives about Jacob, God's guidance continues to be shown in Jacob's superhuman strength and cunning. No attempt is made to glory in that strength but rather to use it as a sign of God's protective presence. It is part of the fulfillment of God's promise to be with Jacob in all that he does (cf. 28:15). The account is similar to Exodus 2:17, where Moses meets his wife by fighting off the shepherds who have driven away the seven daughters of the priest of Midian and prevented them from watering their sheep.

I. Jacob's Marriages (29:14b – 30)

[14b]After Jacob had stayed with him for a whole month, [15]Laban said to him, “Just because you are a relative of mine, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me what your wages should be.”

[16]Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. [17]Leah had weak eyes, but Rachel was lovely in form, and beautiful.

[18]Jacob was in love with Rachel and said, “I’ll work for you seven years in return for your younger daughter Rachel.”

[19]Laban said, “It’s better that I give her to you than to some other man. Stay here with me.” [20]So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.

[21]Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife. My time is completed, and I want to lie with her.”

[22]So Laban brought together all the people of the place and gave a feast. [23]But when evening came, he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob, and Jacob lay with her.

[24]And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant.

[25]When morning came, there was Leah! So Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? I served you for Rachel, didn’t I? Why have you deceived me?”

[26]Laban replied, “It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one. [27]Finish this daughter’s bridal week; then we will give you the younger one also, in return for another seven years of work.”

[28]And Jacob did so. He finished the week with Leah, and then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. [29]Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant. [30]Jacob lay with Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he worked for Laban another seven years.

COMMENTARY

14b – 30 For the first time in the narratives about Jacob, he becomes the object rather than the source of deception. Laban turns the tables on him. The

similarity between what Laban does to Jacob and what Jacob did to Isaac (ch. 27) is patent. Jacob was able to exchange the younger for the older, whereas Laban reverses the trick and exchanges the older for the younger. Jacob gets what he deserves.

Seen in this light, the seven extra years that Jacob serves Laban appear to be a repayment for his treatment of Esau. Something greater is at work behind these events. By calling such situations to the attention of the reader, the writer draws an important lesson from these narratives. Jacob's deceptive schemes for obtaining the blessing apparently do not meet with divine approval. Through Jacob's plans God's will is accomplished; but the writer is intent on pointing out, as well, that the schemes and tricks are not of God's design. God is working despite, not because of, Jacob's tricks.

Given our view of Jacob from previous narratives (e.g., ch. 27), the indignation reflected in his response is shallow at best. He who deceived his father and brother now asks, "Why have you deceived me?" (v.25). Ultimately, Jacob appears speechless in the face of Laban's reply: "It is not our custom here to give the younger daughter in marriage before the older one." So Jacob must work an additional seven years (v.27).

The irony of such a circumstance speaks for itself. The biblical reader is expected to interpret such irony as the work of a divine plan. Jacob's past has caught up with him, and he has no choice but to accept the results and serve Laban seven more years. At first it appears as though Jacob's journey is following the course that Rebekah anticipated when she said, "Stay with him [Laban] for a while [*yāmîm ʾḥādîm*, lit., 'a few days']" (27:44). Thus we are not surprised to read that Jacob's first seven years of working for Laban seemed as though they were "only a few days" [*yāmîm ʾḥādîm*, But with the discovery of Laban's trick, seven more years are added to Rebekah's "few days"; and Jacob's — and Rebekah's — plans begin to unravel.

J. The Birth of Jacob's Sons (29:31 – 30:24)

[31]When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. [32]Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son.

She named him Reuben, for she said, “It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now.”

33She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too.” So she named him Simeon.

34Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons.” So he was named Levi.

35She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, “This time I will praise the LORD.” So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

30:1When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I’ll die!”

2Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”

3Then she said, “Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family.”

4So she gave him her servant Bilhah as a wife. Jacob slept with her, 5and she became pregnant and bore him a son. 6Then Rachel said, “God has vindicated me; he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” Because of this she named him Dan.

7Rachel’s servant Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8Then Rachel said, “I have had a great struggle with my sister, and I have won.” So she named him Naphtali.

9When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her maidservant Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a son. 11Then Leah said,“What good fortune!” So she named him Gad.

12Leah’s servant Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. 13Then Leah said, “How happy I am! The women will call me happy.” So she named him Asher.

14During wheat harvest, Reuben went out into the fields and found some mandrake plants, which he brought to his mother Leah. Rachel said to Leah, “Please give me some of your son’s mandrakes.”

15But she said to her, “Wasn’t it enough that you took away my husband? Will you take my son’s mandrakes too?”

"Very well," Rachel said, "he can sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

16So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.

17God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. 18Then Leah said,"God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar.

19Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun.

21Some time later she gave birth to a daughter and named her Dinah.

22Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. 23She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said,"God has taken away my disgrace."

24She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."

COMMENTARY

29:31 – 30:24 In a way that calls to mind the beginning of the Abrahamic narratives (11:30), the writer introduces the central problem of the narrative: Rachel is barren, but the Lord has opened Leah's womb (29:31). It is initially a surprise to see that the Lord is the one behind Rachel's barrenness. In the preceding chapter (28:14) God promised that Jacob's descendants would be as numerous as the "dust of the earth." Now Rachel, Jacob's wife (29:30), is barren; and it is the Lord's work (v.31).

By means of such reversals the writer may be suggesting that Jacob's plans are coming to naught. Jacob planned to take Rachel as his wife, but God intended him to have Leah. Thus in two major reversals in Jacob's life, we begin to see the writer's thematic purpose taking shape. Jacob sought to marry Rachel, but Laban tricked him. Then Jacob sought to build a family through Rachel, but she was barren; yet God opened Leah's womb. From these details we know God is the one thwarting Jacob's plans.

Jacob's schemes, which have brought him fortune, are doing him no good. His plans are beginning to crumble. Such schemes will not be sufficient to carry out the further plans of God. Jacob, too, will have to depend on God to bring about the divine blessing. In the conflict that ensues between Jacob and his two wives over the birth of their sons, a pattern is etched out for the remainder of Genesis. It is seen in the interplay of the fortunes of Judah (one of Leah's sons, v.35) and Joseph (Rachel's son, 30:24). One of these two sons will bear a royal "offspring."

Though all twelve sons are important to the writer, Joseph and Judah clearly stand out in the narratives that follow. Both are used by God in important ways, but each has a different role to play in the accomplishment of God's blessing. Here at the beginning Judah, the son of Leah, is given the place of preeminence. Contrary to Jacob's own plans, God opens the womb of Leah, not of Rachel. In the end the Lord harkens to Rachel, and her son Joseph is born (30:22). But as Jacob's words to Rachel serve to underscore (30:2), God has withheld sons from Rachel so that the "offspring" of Abraham will be built from Leah.

Even after we are explicitly told that Leah ceased bearing children (29:35c), she goes on to have two more sons and a daughter by Jacob (30:14 – 21). Just as Esau had purchased the birthright for a pot of stew (25:29 – 34), so Leah purchases the right to more children with the mandrakes of her son Reuben (30:14 – 16). All the conflict and tension that exist between Joseph and his brothers — and particularly Joseph and Judah — is anticipated and foreshadowed here in this narrative of their births.

NOTES

29:32 The name רְאוּבֵן (*rᵊʾûbēn*, "Reuben") is a wordplay on כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעָנְיִי (*kî-rāʾâ yhwh bᵉʿonyî*, "the LORD has seen my misery") and thus a combination of *rāʾâ* and *bēn* (בֵּן, "son") from *bᵉʿonyî*. The nature of the wordplay is instructive for the appreciation of wordplays generally in the biblical narratives. They are not intended as etymological statements on the nature of the language; rather, like all wordplays, they reflect a desire to see meaningful connections in the similarities reflected in language.

33 רְאוּבֵן (*rᵉʾûbēn*, "Reuben") is a wordplay on כִּי־רָאָה יְהוָה בְּעָנְיִי (*kî-rāʾâ yhwh bᵉʿonyî*, "the LORD heard that I am not loved"); thus שָׁמַע plus ן from נ in שְׁנִיאָה.

34 לֵוִי (*lēwî*, "Levi") is linked to יִלָּוֶה אִישִׁי (*yillāweh ʾîšî*, "my husband will become attached"); thus לָוָה with the final "i" of אִישִׁי.

35 יְהוּדָה (*yᵉhûdâ*, "Judah") is linked to אוֹדֶה אֶת־יְהוָה (*ʾôdeh ʾet-yhwh*, "I will praise the LORD"); thus אוֹדֶה with יְהוּ for יְהוָה.

30:6 דָּן (*dān*, "Dan") is linked to דָּנַנִי אֱלֹהִים (*dānannî ʾᵉlōhîm*, "God has vindicated me").

8 נַפְתָּלִי (*naptālî*, "Naphtali") is linked to נַפְתּוּלֵי אֱלֹהִים נִפְתַּלְתִּי (*naptûlê ʾᵉlōhîm niptaltî*, "I have wrestled mighty wrestlings [wrestlings of God]"; cf. BDB, 836; NIV, "I have had a great struggle").

11 גָּד (*gād*, "Gad") is linked to בָּגָד (*bᵉgād*, *Kethiv*; *Qere* is בָּא גָּד, *bāʾ gād*). The *Kethiv bᵉgād* is probably the ב (*b*) preposition with *gad* ("good fortune"). The *Qere bāʾ gād* means "good fortune has come."

13 אָשֵׁר (*ʾāšēr*, "Asher") is linked to both בְּאָשְׁרִי (*bᵉʾāšrî*, "How happy I am!") and אִשְּׁרוּנִי בָּנוֹת (*ʾiššᵉrûnî bānôt*, "women will call me happy").

18 יִשָּׂשכָר (*yiśśāśkār*, "Issachar") is linked to לְאִישִׁי ... שְׂכָרִי (*śᵉkārî ... lᵉʾîšî*, "rewarded me ... to my husband").

20 זְבוּלֻן (*zᵉbulûn*, "Zebulun") is linked to זְבָדַנִי אֱלֹהִים אֹתִי זֶבֶד טוֹב הַפַּעַם יִזְבְּלֵנִי אִישִׁי (*zᵉbādanî ʾᵉlōhîm ʾôtî zēbed ṭôb happaʿam yizbᵉlēnî ʾîšî*, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will honor me"), and thus זָבַד (*zābad*, "to present with") and זָבַל (*zābal*, "to honor").

21 There is no word association for דִּינָה (*dînâ*, "Dinah").

23 – 24 יוֹסֵף (*yôsēp*, "Joseph") is linked to אָסַף (*ʾāsap*, "to take away")—viz., אָסַף אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חֶרְפָּתִי (*ʾāsap ʾᵉlōhîm ʾet-ḥerpātî*, "God has taken away my disgrace") — and in the following verse to יֹסֵף (*yōsēp*, "add")—viz., יֹסֵף יְהוָה לִי בֵּן אַחֵר (*yōsēp yhwh lî bēn ʾaḥēr*, "may the LORD add to me another son").

K. Jacob and Laban's Sheep (30:25 – 43)

25 After Rachel gave birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Send me on

my way so I can go back to my own homeland. [26]Give me my wives and children, for whom I have served you, and I will be on my way. You know how much work I've done for you."

[27]But Laban said to him, "If I have found favor in your eyes, please stay. I have learned by divination that the LORD has blessed me because of you." [28]He added, "Name your wages, and I will pay them."

[29]Jacob said to him, "You know how I have worked for you and how your livestock has fared under my care. [30]The little you had before I came has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you wherever I have been. But now, when may I do something for my own household?"

[31]"What shall I give you?" he asked.

"Don't give me anything," Jacob replied. "But if you will do this one thing for me, I will go on tending your flocks and watching over them: [32]Let me go through all your flocks today and remove from them every speckled or spotted sheep, every dark-colored lamb and every spotted or speckled goat. They will be my wages. [33]And my honesty will testify for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not speckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-colored, will be considered stolen."

[34]"Agreed," said Laban. "Let it be as you have said." [35]That same day he removed all the male goats that were streaked or spotted, and all the speckled or spotted female goats (all that had white on them) and all the dark-colored lambs, and he placed them in the care of his sons. [36]Then he put a three-day journey between himself and Jacob, while Jacob continued to tend the rest of Laban's flocks.

[37]Jacob, however, took fresh-cut branches from poplar, almond and plane trees and made white stripes on them by peeling the bark and exposing the white inner wood of the branches. [38]Then he placed the peeled branches in all the watering troughs, so that they would be directly in front of the flocks when they came to drink. When the flocks were in heat and came to drink, [39]they mated in front of the branches. And they bore young that were streaked or speckled or spotted. [40]Jacob set apart the young of the flock by themselves, but made the rest face the streaked and dark-colored animals that belonged to Laban. Thus he made separate flocks for himself and did not put them with Laban's animals. [41]Whenever the stronger females were in heat, Jacob would place the branches in the troughs in front of the animals so they would mate near the branches, [42]but if the animals were

weak, he would not place them there. So the weak animals went to Laban and the strong ones to Jacob. [43]In this way the man grew exceedingly prosperous and came to own large flocks, and maidservants and menservants, and camels and donkeys.

COMMENTARY

25 – 43 After the account of the birth of Jacob's sons, the writer turns to his departure from Haran (vv.25 – 26). Laban, seeking a divine blessing from Jacob (v.27), attempts to settle his account with Jacob and asks him for a reckoning of his wages (v.28). Laban's offer contains a request that Jacob stay on with him and continue to watch over his herds. (Though the words "please stay" in the early versions are not in the MT, they represent an accurate picture of what Laban's words imply.) Jacob strikes a bargain with Laban that results in great blessing and wealth for him.

The point of this narrative is to show the ultimate origin of Jacob's blessing. It does not come from Laban; rather, it is a gift from God. As Abraham rejected the offer of wealth from the king of Sodom (14:21), so Jacob refuses to take anything from Laban. What Jacob chooses instead is the right to stay on and shepherd Laban's flocks and to keep for himself a portion of the herd (v.31). After the deal is struck, Jacob is allowed to keep the speckled or spotted goats as well as the black sheep in Laban's herds. From such he can build his own herds.

Though the writer does not specifically state it within the narrative, the passage is surely to be read as an example of the Lord's promise in ch. 28 to be with Jacob during his sojourn in the east. Jacob's use of peeled poplar branches is not so much intended to demonstrate his resourcefulness as it is to further the theme of God's continued faithfulness to his word. The clue to the meaning of the passage is found in the last verse of the chapter (v.43), where the writer gives a summary of the narrative. It alludes to God's previous blessing of both Abraham (12:16) and Isaac (26:14) and thus puts the events of this chapter within the larger context of themes developed throughout the book.

Chief among these themes is God's promise of blessing and his faithfulness to his word. Seen in that light, Jacob's "wise dealings" with Laban are offered as an

example of the way God has caused him to prosper during this sojourn. Further confirmation of that meaning lies in the words of Jacob himself in ch. 31. Looking back on these events, Jacob tells his wives that it is God who has taken Laban's herds and given them to him (31:9). Seen from this point of view, these narratives demonstrate that God has been faithful to him. In spite of what appears to be little more than a cleverly devised breeding technique (to increase the spotted and dark sheep in Jacob's herds), we learn from these verses what has prospered Jacob is God's faithfulness.

NOTE

30 The words of Jacob in this verse — "the little you had . . . has increased greatly, and the LORD has blessed you" — provide the motivation of the story that follows, and the conclusion of the narrative recalls these words: "the man grew exceedingly prosperous" (v.43).

L. Jacob's Flight from Laban (31:1 – 21)

[1]Jacob heard that Laban's sons were saying, "Jacob has taken everything
our father owned and has gained all this wealth from what belonged to our
father." [2]And Jacob noticed that Laban's attitude toward him was not what
it had been.

[3]Then the LORD said to Jacob, "Go back to the land of your fathers and
to your relatives, and I will be with you."

[4]So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where
his flocks were. [5]He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward
me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me.
[6]You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, [7]yet your
father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has
not allowed him to harm me. [8]If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your
wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The
streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young.
[9]So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me.

[10]"In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw

that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. [11]The angel of God said to me in the dream, ‘Jacob.’ I answered, ‘Here I am.’ [12]And he said,‘Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. [13]I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.’ ”

[14]Then Rachel and Leah replied, “Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father’s estate? [15]Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he has used up what was paid for us. [16]Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you.”

[17]Then Jacob put his children and his wives on camels, [18]and he drove all his livestock ahead of him, along with all the goods he had accumulated in Paddan Aram, to go to his father Isaac in the land of Canaan.

[19]When Laban had gone to shear his sheep, Rachel stole her father’s household gods. [20]Moreover, Jacob deceived Laban the Aramean by not telling him he was running away. [21]So he fled with all he had, and crossing the River, he headed for the hill country of Gilead.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 In the same way that Isaac’s wealth provoked the Philistines to jealousy (26:14), Laban is provoked to jealousy because of Jacob’s wealth (vv.1 – 2).

It is at this time that the Lord calls Jacob to return to the land of his fathers (v.3). We are again reminded of the Lord’s promise to be “with” (*ʿimmāk,* cf. 28:15) Jacob on his journey. God’s call of Jacob points him once again toward Bethel, the place of God’s original promise. So the story of Jacob has reached its middle point. It is both the turning point of the narrative and the turning point in the life of Jacob. Jacob is now on his way back to Bethel, and the conversation of the narrative begins again to point toward blessing.

Later (32:10), when Jacob looks back to this point in his life and within the narrative account of it, he repeats the Lord’s initial words of comfort and

promise on his first visit to Bethel. In this repetition of the Lord's words of promise, Jacob restates God's promise in a slightly different form, which brings out more clearly his understanding of the Lord's promise. Instead of God's initial statement of the promise, "I will be with you" (*ʿimmāk,* 31:3; 28:15), Jacob recalls God's words as, "I will make you prosper" (*hêṭîbâ,* 32:10, 13). God promised to be "with" Jacob, but after all he has been through and has experienced "with" God, Jacob understands this promise to mean that God would "be good" to him.

Jacob's words thus offer an expansion and commentary on the sense of God's original promise to be "with" him, not unlike the commentary offered by Joseph to his brothers at the end of his life: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (50:20). Such an understanding of the divine presence ("I will be with you"; cf. 39:2) illustrates the writer's own hope in what God's presence should mean for the sons of Jacob. God's promise to be "with" Jacob thus becomes a source of confidence in his continual care and blessing of Abraham's seed (see Notes). Jacob's restatement of God's promise is echoed in the explanation of God's name in Exodus 3. In revealing the divine name to Moses, God promised to be "with" him (Ex 3:12).What that would mean for Moses and his people is seen in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage (Ex 3:20 – 22).

4 – 13 Jacob's words of explanation to his wives repeat the primary events of the preceding chapter. In effect he retells the story. It is as though the narrator wants Jacob to repeat the story from his own perspective. In doing so Jacob clarifies some of the more confusing events of that chapter. Not only does his explanation help his wives understand the course of those earlier events, but also his words are a helpful guide to the reader in understanding the narratives that precede and follow.

As we have often seen in Genesis, the events find their explanation in their being retold. Though it may appear to the reader that Jacob has been getting the better of Laban, from Jacob's own restatement of his actions the Lord is repaying Jacob for Laban's mistreatment of him. In Jacob's explanation of these events, we see them in a much clearer light. They are part of the outworking of God's plan — a plan that began with Jacob's vow at Bethel and the Lord's promise to be with him. Even Laban's change of attitude toward Jacob and the jealousy of his sons are seen as part of God's plan.

14 – 21 Like Rebekah (24:58) before them and later Ruth (Ru 1:16), Jacob's wives are willing to leave their own families and return with their husband to the land of Canaan. More important, they are also ready to put their trust in and seek the blessing of Jacob's God (31:16).

After such praiseworthy treatment of the wives of Jacob within the narrative, it comes as some surprise that the writer immediately turns to Rachel's stealing of Laban's "household gods" (31:19). What point does this make within the narrative? Is there a point, or is this merely an anomaly? Specifically, are we to view Rachel's actions favorably, or do they reveal a weakness of character not yet detected in this wife of Jacob? One element in the narrative that may point us to a solution is the similarity and contrasts between Rachel's stealing of her father's "household gods" when fleeing home with her husband, and Jacob's stealing of his father's blessing when fleeing from home to find a wife (ch. 27). In both situations it is the younger who steals what rightfully belongs to the elder. Jacob's stealing of the blessing (27:30) appears to be consciously recast in the form of Rachel's stealing of her father's wealth.

In recasting these two narratives, the writer is careful to absolve Isaac and Jacob of any part in the deed. We are reminded that just as Isaac did not know that Jacob was stealing the blessing, Jacob does not know that Rachel has taken the gods (31:32). Ironically, it is through Rachel's resourcefulness, not Jacob's, that Laban's prized possessions are successfully taken.

NOTES

3 God's words here — וְאֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ (*wᵉʾehyeh ʿimmāk,* "I will be with you") — and the way they are later interpreted by Jacob — יְהוָה הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי ... וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ (*yhwh hāʾōmēr ʾēlay ... wᵉʾēṭîbâ ʿimmāk,* "O LORD who said to me . . . I will make you prosper," 32:9[10]) — is an example of the way biblical narratives allow their characters to offer their own interpretations of the meaning of events. The most striking example of this in Genesis is the account of Abraham's servant's seeking of a bride for Isaac (Ge 24).

19 According to vv.30, 32, הַתְּרָפִים (*hattᵉrāpîm,* "household gods") are אֱלֹהִים (*ʾᵉlōhîm,* "gods"). Although a number of suggestions have been offered regarding the purpose of

these “gods,” v.37 indicates that the *hatt^erāpîm* seem to represent Laban’s wealth and possessions: מִכֹּל כְּלֵי־בֵיתֶךָ (*mikkōl kĕlê-bêtekā,* lit., “from any of the goods of your household”). That is the sense given to them by the story.

M. Jacob Overtaken by Laban (31:22 – 55)

22On the third day Laban was told that Jacob had fled. 23Taking his
relatives with him, he pursued Jacob for seven days and caught up with him
in the hill country of Gilead. 24Then God came to Laban the Aramean in a
dream at night and said to him, “Be careful not to say anything to Jacob,
either good or bad.”

25Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban
overtook him, and Laban and his relatives camped there too. 26Then Laban
said to Jacob, “What have you done? You’ve deceived me, and you’ve
carried off my daughters like captives in war. 27Why did you run off
secretly and deceive me? Why didn’t you tell me, so I could send you away
with joy and singing to the music of tambourines and harps? 28You didn’t
even let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters good-by. You have
done a foolish thing. 29I have the power to harm you; but last night the God
of your father said to me, ‘Be careful not to say anything to Jacob, either
good or bad.’ 30Now you have gone off because you longed to return to
your father’s house. But why did you steal my gods?”

31Jacob answered Laban,“I was afraid, because I thought you would take
your daughters away from me by force. 32But if you find anyone who has
your gods, he shall not live. In the presence of our relatives, see for yourself
whether there is anything of yours here with me; and if so, take it.” Now
Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

33So Laban went into Jacob’s tent and into Leah’s tent and into the tent of
the two maidservants, but he found nothing. After he came out of Leah’s
tent, he entered Rachel’s tent. 34Now Rachel had taken the household gods
and put them inside her camel’s saddle and was sitting on them. Laban
searched through everything in the tent but found nothing.

35Rachel said to her father, “Don’t be angry, my lord, that I cannot stand
up in your presence; I’m having my period.” So he searched but could not
find the household gods.

[36]Jacob was angry and took Laban to task. “What is my crime?” he asked Laban. “What sin have I committed that you hunt me down? [37]Now that you have searched through all my goods, what have you found that belongs to your household? Put it here in front of your relatives and mine, and let them judge between the two of us.

[38]“I have been with you for twenty years now. Your sheep and goats have not miscarried, nor have I eaten rams from your flocks. [39]I did not bring you animals torn by wild beasts; I bore the loss myself. And you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. [40]This was my situation: The heat consumed me in the daytime and the cold at night, and sleep fled from my eyes. [41]It was like this for the twenty years I was in your household. I worked for you fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and you changed my wages ten times. [42]If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you.”

[43]Laban answered Jacob, “The women are my daughters, the children are my children, and the flocks are my flocks. All you see is mine. Yet what can I do today about these daughters of mine, or about the children they have borne? [44]Come now, let’s make a covenant, you and I, and let it serve as a witness between us.”

[45]So Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. [46]He said to his relatives,“Gather some stones.” So they took stones and piled them in a heap, and they ate there by the heap. [47]Laban called it Jegar Sahadutha, and Jacob called it Galeed.

[48]Laban said, “This heap is a witness between you and me today.” That is why it was called Galeed. [49]It was also called Mizpah, because he said, “May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. [50]If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me.”

[51]Laban also said to Jacob, “Here is this heap, and here is this pillar I have set up between you and me. [52]This heap is a witness, and this pillar is a witness, that I will not go past this heap to your side to harm you and that you will not go past this heap and pillar to my side to harm me. [53]May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge

between us."

So Jacob took an oath in the name of the Fear of his father Isaac. [54]He offered a sacrifice there in the hill country and invited his relatives to a meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

[55]Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them. Then he left and returned home.

COMMENTARY

22 – 42 The dispute over the stolen household gods (v.30) gives an occasion for the writer to restate his central theme, which is found in Jacob's parting words to Laban: "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been with me, you would surely have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands, and last night he rebuked you" (31:42).The point of Jacob's words is clear: his wealth has not come through Laban. On the contrary, it has come only through God's gracious care during his difficult sojourn.We see these events not only in the eyes of the writer of Genesis, but also in the eyes of the central characters of the stories.

43 – 55 The narrative concludes with an account of a covenant (*bᵉrît*, v.44) between Jacob and Laban. Just as Isaac parted ways with Abimelech by entering into a covenant (26:28 – 31), so Jacob and Laban now part ways by entering a covenant.

NOTES

48 The name "Galeed" (גַּלְעֵד, *gal·ēd*) is linked to "a heap of witness" (*galʿēd*).

49 A further link is made to the place of the contract by the wordplay between the name of the place "Mizpah" (הַמִּצְפָּה, *hammiṣpâ*), linked with יִצֶף יהוה (*yiṣep yhuh*, "may the LORD keep watch") and the "pillar" (הַמַּצֵּבָה, *hamaṣṣēbâ*) Jacob set up in v.45 (cf. v.51).

N. Jacob's Meeting with Angels (32:1 – 2)

[1]Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. [2]When Jacob saw them, he said, "This is the camp of God!" So he named that place Mahanaim.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 The events of ch. 32 are wedged between two accounts of Jacob's encounter with angels (vv.1, 25). The effect of these brief episodes is striking when viewed within the context of Genesis as a whole. Twice Jacob meets and must deal with angels on returning to the land.

The mention of these encounters is motivated by a similar picture in the early chapters of Genesis. When the first man and his wife were cast out of the garden, angels (cherubim) were placed on the borders of the garden to keep them out. The "cherubim" were positioned on the east of the garden to guard the way to the tree of life. As Jacob now returns from the east, he is met by angels. This brief notice may be intended to alert the reader to the meaning of Jacob's later wrestling with the "man" (אִישׁ) at Peniel (vv.25 – 30). The fact that Jacob already meets with angels here suggests that the man at the end of the chapter may also be an angel.

NOTES

1 - 2 The chiastic coordination וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב לָבָן לִמְקֹמוֹ וְיַעֲקֹב הָלַךְ לְדַרְכּוֹ (*wayyēlek wayyāšob lābān limqōmô wᵉya*ᶜ*qōb hālak lᵉdarkô*, "Then [Laban] left and returned home. Jacob also went on his way") suggests that the *Masorah* is correct in reading 32:1 - 3 as the conclusion of the preceding narrative and not the opening of a new section, as in our English Bibles.

2[3] As throughout the preceding narrative, the place name מַחֲנָיִם (*maḥᵃnāyim*, "Mahanaim") is identified by means of a wordplay on "camp [מַחֲנֵה, *maḥᵃnēh*] of God."

O. Messengers Sent to Esau (32:3 – 22)

[3]Jacob sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom. [4]He instructed them: “This is what you are to say to my master Esau: ‘Your servant Jacob says, I have been staying with Laban and have remained there till now. [5]I have cattle and donkeys, sheep and goats, menservants and maidservants. Now I am sending this message to my lord, that I may find favor in your eyes.’ ”

[6]When the messengers returned to Jacob, they said, “We went to your brother Esau, and now he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men are with him.”

[7]In great fear and distress Jacob divided the people who were with him into two groups, and the flocks and herds and camels as well. [8]He thought, “If Esau comes and attacks one group, the group that is left may escape.”

[9]Then Jacob prayed, “O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper,’ [10]I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant. I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups. [11]Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother Esau, for I am afraid he will come and attack me, and also the mothers with their children. [12]But you have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea, which cannot be counted.’ ”

[13]He spent the night there, and from what he had with him he selected a gift for his brother Esau: [14]two hundred female goats and twenty male goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, [15]thirty female camels with their young, forty cows and ten bulls, and twenty female donkeys and ten male donkeys. [16]He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, “Go ahead of me, and keep some space between the herds.”

[17]He instructed the one in the lead: “When my brother Esau meets you and asks, ‘To whom do you belong, and where are you going, and who owns all these animals in front of you?’ [18]then you are to say, ‘They belong to your servant Jacob. They are a gift sent to my lord Esau, and he is coming behind us.’ ”

[19]He also instructed the second, the third and all the others who followed the herds: “You are to say the same thing to Esau when you meet him.

[20]And be sure to say, ‘Your servant Jacob is coming behind us.’ ” For he thought, “I will pacify him with these gifts I am sending on ahead; later, when I see him, perhaps he will receive me.” [21]So Jacob’s gifts went on ahead of him, but he himself spent the night in the camp.

[22]That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok.

COMMENTARY

3 – 12 The emphasis of this chapter and the next is on the wealth of Jacob and the restoration of the two brothers, Jacob and Esau. Much suspense surrounds Jacob’s reunion with his brother, Esau. Like Jacob himself, we the readers are kept in the dark about Esau’s intentions. Why is he coming with four hundred (v.6) men to meet Jacob on his return? When last we heard about Esau, his intention was to take revenge on Jacob for his stolen blessing (27:41). Jacob’s fear that Esau may now come to do just that seems well founded.

In this light Jacob’s prayer (vv.9 – 12) plays a crucial role in reversing the state of affairs. Jacob prays, “Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, Esau” (v.11), and he then appeals to the promises God had made throughout the preceding chapters: “You have said, ‘I will surely make you prosper and will make your descendants like the sand of the sea’ ” (v.13).

13 – 22 True to form, Jacob makes elaborate plans to save himself and his family in the face of Esau’s potential threat. He provides his servants with abundant gifts for Esau and directs them on how to approach Esau when they meet. In it all, his thought is that he will “pacify” Esau and deliver his family from the hand of his brother.

A familiar picture of Jacob emerges in this narrative — it is of Jacob the planner and schemer. As he took Esau’s birthright and blessing, as he took the best of Laban’s herds, so now he has a plan to pacify Esau. As the narrative unfolds, however, it is not Jacob’s plan that succeeds but his prayer. When he meets with Esau, he finds that Esau has had a change of heart. Running to meet Jacob, Esau embraces and kisses him and weeps (33:4). All of Jacob’s plans and schemes have come to naught. Apart from all of them, God has prepared Jacob’s

way.

NOTES

9[10] See Notes on 31:3.

P. Jacob's Wrestling (32:23 – 32)

[23]After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. [24]So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. [25]When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. [26]Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

[27]The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

[28]Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

[29]Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

[30]So Jacob called the place Peniel, saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

[31]The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, and he was limping because of his hip. [32]Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

COMMENTARY

23 – 32 There are many unanswered questions in this brief narrative of Jacob's wrestling with the angel. It is, however, likely that the picture of Jacob's struggle with God is meant to epitomize the whole of the narratives about Jacob. Throughout the narratives Jacob's life has been characterized by struggle —

particularly by a struggle to obtain a blessing from God, as here (cf. 32:26b). Jacob has struggled with his brother (chs. 25, 27), his father (ch. 27), his father-in-law (chs. 29 – 31), and now with God (ch. 32). His own words express the underlying meaning of each of these narratives: "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (32:26). Here we see a graphic picture of Jacob's struggling for the blessing, struggling with God and man (v.28).

Most significant is the fact that Jacob emerges victorious in his struggle: "You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome" (v.28). Jacob's victory, even in his struggle with God, comes when the angel "blesses" him (v.29). The importance of Jacob's naming of the site as "Peniel" (v.30) is that it identifies as God the one with whom Jacob has been wrestling. Jacob said, "I saw God face to face" (v.30). Jacob's remark does not necessarily mean that the "man" (אִישׁ) with whom he wrestled is God. Rather, as with other, similar statements (e.g., Jdg 13:22; see comments on ch. 18), when one saw the "angel of the LORD," it was appropriate to claim to have seen the face of God (but cf. Hos 12:2 – 4).

NOTES

28[29] The name יִשְׂרָאֵל (*yiśrāʾēl*, "Israel") is associated with שָׂרִיתָ עִם אֱלֹהִים (*śārîtā ʿim-ʾelōhîm*, "you have struggled with God"), sounding a note that occurs in the later literature (e.g., Hos 12:2 - 6).

30[31] The place name פְּנִיאֵל (*pᵉniʾēl*, "Peniel"), or פְּנוּאֵל (*pᵉnûʾēl*, "Penuel"), is linked to the phrase "face to face" (פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים, *pānîm ʾel-pānîm*). The difference between *pᵉniʾēl* and *pᵉnûʾēl* is probably due to the survival of earlier case endings (Meyer, *Hebräische Grammatik*, 2:49).

Q. Jacob's Meeting With Esau (33:1 – 17)

[1]Jacob looked up and there was Esau, coming with his four hundred men;
so he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maidservants.
[2]He put the maidservants and their children in front, Leah and her children

next, and Rachel and Joseph in the rear. [3]He himself went on ahead and bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother.

[4]But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced him; he threw his arms around his neck and kissed him. And they wept. [5]Then Esau looked up and saw the women and children. “Who are these with you?” he asked.

Jacob answered, “They are the children God has graciously given your servant.”

[6]Then the maidservants and their children approached and bowed down. [7]Next, Leah and her children came and bowed down. Last of all came Joseph and Rachel, and they too bowed down.

[8]Esau asked, “What do you mean by all these droves I met?”

“To find favor in your eyes, my lord,” he said.

[9]But Esau said, “I already have plenty, my brother. Keep what you have for yourself.”

[10]“No, please!” said Jacob. “If I have found favor in your eyes, accept this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, now that you have received me favorably. [11]Please accept the present that was brought to you, for God has been gracious to me and I have all I need.” And because Jacob insisted, Esau accepted it.

[12]Then Esau said, “Let us be on our way; I’ll accompany you.”

[13]But Jacob said to him, “My lord knows that the children are tender and that I must care for the ewes and cows that are nursing their young. If they are driven hard just one day, all the animals will die. [14]So let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I move along slowly at the pace of the droves before me and that of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

[15]Esau said, “Then let me leave some of my men with you.”

“But why do that?” Jacob asked. “Just let me find favor in the eyes of my lord.”

[16]So that day Esau started on his way back to Seir. [17]Jacob, however, went to Succoth, where he built a place for himself and made shelters for his livestock. That is why the place is called Succoth.

COMMENTARY

1 – 17 When Jacob sees Esau and the four hundred men approaching, he divides his entourage again (cf. 32:7 – 8). He shows his preference for Rachel

and Joseph by putting them last after his wives' maidens and Leah and her sons. Neither Jacob nor the reader expects Esau's greeting. Right up to this point in the narrative, Jacob expects revenge from Esau, or if not revenge, then heavy bargaining and appeasement. The reader still has no sense that Jacob's fears are not well founded. We could not have guessed that in response to Jacob's prayer (cf. 32:11) Esau has had a change of heart.

The change in Esau is depicted graphically in the contrast between Jacob's fearful approach ("[he] bowed down to the ground seven times as he approached his brother," v.3) and the eager excitement of Esau to see his brother ("But Esau ran to meet Jacob and embraced . . . and kissed him," v.4). All of Jacob's plans and preparations pale in importance to Esau's joy at his arrival. Ironically, the four hundred men accompanying Esau turn out not to be for battle with Jacob's household and for taking his spoils, but rather for safeguarding Jacob's family during the final stages of his journey (v.15).

The picture of Jacob and Esau here foreshadows the relationship between the Davidic monarchy and Esau's descendants, the Edomites, especially as that relationship is depicted in the later prophetic books. Though often there was resentment between the two nations, which God frequently used to chastise his disobedient people (e.g., 1Ki 11:14; Ob 1 – 18), in the end God's kingdom was to be graciously extended to include the land of Edom (Ob 21).

NOTES

4 The verb וַיִּשָּׁקֵהוּ (*wayyiššāqēhû*, "and he kissed him") is not in the LXX and is marked with "dots" in the MT. There is little understanding of the nature of Masoretic dots, but in this case it may mean the word was not considered original (cf. Israel Yeivin, *Introduction to the Tiberian Masorah*, trans. E. J. Revell [Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1980], 45).

REFLECTIONS

Once again in this chapter, Jacob is portrayed as one who goes to great lengths

to secure his own well-being, but his efforts prove pointless in the light of the obvious evidence of divine intervention in the final outcome. Jacob continues to scheme and plan; yet God's own plans ultimately make Jacob's plans worthless. God is in charge of what happens to his people.

R. Jacob at Shechem (33:18 – 34:31)

18 After Jacob came from Paddan Aram, he arrived safely at the city of
Shechem in Canaan and camped within sight of the city. 19 For a hundred
pieces of silver, he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem,
the plot of ground where he pitched his tent. 20 There he set up an altar and
called it El Elohe Israel.

34:1 Now Dinah, the daughter Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit
the women of the land. 2 When Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler
of that area, saw her, he took her and violated her. 3 His heart was drawn to
Dinah daughter of Jacob, and he loved the girl and spoke tenderly to her.
4 And Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl as my wife."

5 When Jacob heard that his daughter Dinah had been defiled, his sons
were in the fields with his livestock; so he kept quiet about it until they
came home.

6 Then Shechem's father Hamor went out to talk with Jacob. 7 Now
Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had
happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done
a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter — a thing that
should not be done.

8 But Hamor said to them, "My son Shechem has his heart set on your
daughter. Please give her to him as his wife. 9 Intermarry with us; give us
your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. 10 You can settle
among us; the land is open to you. Live in it, trade in it, and acquire
property in it."

11 Then Shechem said to Dinah's father and brothers, "Let me find favor
in your eyes, and I will give you whatever you ask. 12 Make the price for the
bride and the gift I am to bring as great as you like, and I'll pay whatever
you ask me. Only give me the girl as my wife."

13 Because their sister Dinah had been defiled, Jacob's sons replied

deceitfully as they spoke to Shechem and his father Hamor. [14]They said to them, “We can’t do such a thing; we can’t give our sister to a man who is not circumcised. That would be a disgrace to us. [15]We will give our consent to you on one condition only: that you become like us by circumcising all your males. [16]Then we will give you our daughters and take your daughters for ourselves. We’ll settle among you and become one people with you. [17]But if you will not agree to be circumcised, we’ll take our sister and go.”

[18]Their proposal seemed good to Hamor and his son Shechem. [19]The young man, who was the most honored of all his father’s household, lost no time in doing what they said, because he was delighted with Jacob’s daughter. [20]So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city to speak to their fellow townsmen. [21]“These men are friendly toward us,” they said. “Let them live in our land and trade in it; the land has plenty of room for them. We can marry their daughters and they can marry ours. [22]But the men will consent to live with us as one people only on the condition that our males be circumcised, as they themselves are. [23]Won’t their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours? So let us give our consent to them, and they will settle among us.”

[24]All the men who went out of the city gate agreed with Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male in the city was circumcised.

[25]Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob’s sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. [26]They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem’s house and left. [27]The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. [28]They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. [29]They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses.

[30]Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed.”

[31]But they replied,“Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?”

COMMENTARY

33:18 – 20 These last verses form a transition in the narrative between Jacob's sojourn in the east and events of the later years of his life in Canaan. As he left Canaan in ch. 28, Jacob vowed that if God would be with him and watch over him so that he returned to the land "in peace" (*bᵉšālôm*; NIV, "safely"), he would give God a tenth of all he had (28:20 – 22). The narrative has been careful to follow the events in Jacob's life that have shown the Lord's faithfulness to this vow. Here we are told that Jacob has returned "safely" (*šālēm*, v.18) to the land of Canaan. Though he is not yet to Bethel, he is "in Canaan"; thus God has been faithful.

Jacob returns to Bethel in ch. 35 and builds an altar there (v.7). No mention is made in any of these texts of Jacob's giving a "tenth" of all he has to the Lord. Some assume that the erection of an altar here and in ch. 35, along with the offerings presented on it, represent his "tenth" (Keil, 283). It may be also that the "hundred pieces of silver" (v.19) that he pays for the portion of land where an altar is built is intended to represent a portion of that "tenth." The portion of land purchased by Jacob at Shechem plays an important role in later biblical narratives. This is in this portion that the Israelites bury the bones of Joseph (Jos 24:32); thus it represents their hope in God's ultimate fulfillment of the promises.

34:1 The birth of Dinah was recorded with little comment in 30:21. When Jacob and his family depart from Paddan Aram and settle near Shechem (vv.18 – 20), Dinah becomes the center of the conflict between Jacob and the inhabitants of Canaan. The point of the narrative is to reiterate the portrait of Jacob that has been central throughout these stories — that of a man who plans and schemes for what appear to be his own interests but who, in the end and in spite of himself, accomplishes God's purposes. In the present narrative God's purpose in setting apart the descendants of Abraham is obstructed by the proposal of marriage between Dinah and Shechem.

Throughout this story we are reminded of the purpose of the proposed marriage: that the family of Jacob might become "one people" (vv.16, 22) with the inhabitants of Canaan. The last time that such a proposal was made was in the building of the city of Babylon (11:6).That the writer disapproves of the plan is clear from the way the wording of the proposal runs counter to Abraham's

admonition to his servant in seeking a wife for his son Isaac (“Swear by the LORD, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not get a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I am living” [24:3]); to Rebekah’s fear in the case of Jacob (“If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living” [27:46]); and finally to Isaac’s command (“Do not marry a Canaanite woman” [28:1]).

While the story in this chapter operates at a level of family honor and the brothers’ concern for their ravaged sister, there is also a subtheme that runs throughout the narratives about Jacob: God works through and often in spite of the self-serving plans of humankind. The writer’s purpose is not to approve these human plans and schemes but rather to show how God can still achieve his purpose through, or in spite of, them.

2 – 4 Though the narrative is clear that Shechem, the Hivite son, genuinely loves Dinah (v.3), the main point is that he has taken her and compromised her (v.2), apparently against her will, and has thus humiliated her. The final words of Simeon and Levi about the incident express how they view the situation: “Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?” (v.31).

5 – 24 Jacob is curiously silent about the incident. When he hears what has happened to Dinah, he waits for his sons to return. The reason for his silence is not clear at the beginning of the story. Does he have a plan, and is he merely waiting for the right opportunity? Or is he afraid to act in the absence of his sons? Is he afraid to act at all? Such questions remain unanswered in the narrative.

It is significant, however, that throughout the story it is the sons of Jacob, not Jacob himself, who carry out the deception; and at the end of the story Jacob admonishes his sons for their actions. The plans and schemes are no longer Jacob’s; they are the plans and schemes of his sons.The sons of Jacob have taken the place of their father in the thematic structure of the narratives. In his last words to Simeon and Levi, Jacob expresses harsh words for the events of this chapter: “Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger. . . . Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!” (49:6 – 7). The present narrative thus does not linger at this point to

explain Jacob's passive role. It moves on quickly to describe the cunning vengeance of Simeon and Levi.

That Simeon and Levi have a plan of deception to repay the offense is already suggested in the report of their anger at hearing the news of Dinah (v.7). The reader knows from the bitterness of their anger that they will not let this act go unpunished. The course of action they choose plays remarkably well into the hands of the writer in the development of his themes. In ch. 17 the rite of circumcision was to be a sign (ʾôt, v.11) of the unity of the covenantal people over against the rest of the nations. Circumcision was not limited to Abraham's descendants but was given as a sign of one's joining in the hope of God's promises. It was, in fact, a sign given of the covenantal promise that Abraham would become the father of "many nations" (17:5).

But in the way the sons of Jacob carry out the request that these Canaanites be circumcised, there is a curious reversal of God's intention. They have offered circumcision as a means for the two families to become "one people" (ʿam ʾeḥād, v.16). The Canaanites are not joining the offspring of Abraham; rather, the descendants of Abraham are joining the Canaanites. The importance of this point is stressed when Shechem repeats it to his countrymen: "Won't their livestock, their property and all their other animals become ours?" (v.23). Schechem's words express the thoughts of the writer. A thematic interplay between chs. 17 and 34 thus lies behind the writer's reason for including this narrative in the book.

A further indication of this narrative interrelationship is the wordplay in the two chapters between the word "sign" (ʾôt, 17:11) and the "consent" (ʾôt; cf. vv.15, 22 – 23) of the two families to live as "one people." What is the overall purpose of the association between the two chapters? What point is the writer making? Again the solution lies in the way the present narrative fits into the larger thematic development within the narratives about Jacob. Jacob and his family have continuously been characterized in the preceding narratives as those who attempt to carry out God's intentions with their own plans and schemes. On the surface their plans work reasonably well, but they always involve cunning and deceit to be successful.

The writer does not wish to suggest that in such plans God's own plans are

represented. On the contrary, Jacob's plans and those of his family are depicted as the plans of those who are far out ahead of God and his plans. But the ultimate purpose of these narratives is to show that in spite of the fact that such plans run counter to God's own, they do not, and cannot, create an obstacle to the eventual outworking of God's plans.

25 – 31 As the sons of Jacob carry out their deception to the end, the writer is careful not to let their actions go unrebuked. Jacob's words express the writer's final judgment on the actions of the sons: "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizzites, the people living in this land" (v.30). The writer then allows the final reply of the sons to stand as the last words of the narrative, showing that their motive was not merely plunder but the honor of their sister (v.31).

NOTE

7 בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל (*bᵉyiśrāʾēl*) can mean "in Israel" or "against Israel" (BDB, 89, II.4.a). In the first instance Israel is referring to a people, whereas in the second Israel is referring to the individual. Since the individual is called Jacob in this section, *bᵉyiśrāʾēl* likely refers to the people. Within the perspective of the horizons of the narrative, the sons of Jacob are already being thought of as a people.

S. Jacob's Return to Bethel (35:1 – 15)

[1]Then God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there, and build an altar there to God, who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau."

[2]So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes. [3] Then come, let us go up to Bethel, where I will build an altar to God, who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone." [4]So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem. [5]Then they set out, and the terror of God fell upon the towns all around

them so that no one pursued them.

[6]Jacob and all the people with him came to Luz (that is, Bethel) in the land of Canaan. [7]There he built an altar, and he called the place El Bethel, because it was there that God revealed himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

[8]Now Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died and was buried under the oak below Bethel. So it was named Allon Bacuth.

[9]After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. [10]God said to him, "Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel." So he named him Israel.

[11]And God said to him,"I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. [12]The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you." [13]Then God went up from him at the place where he had talked with him.

[14]Jacob set up a stone pillar at the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink offering on it; he also poured oil on it. [15]Jacob called the place where God had talked with him Bethel.

COMMENTARY

1 – 5 This chapter opens with a reference to 28:10 – 15, which records the appearance of the Lord to Jacob at Bethel.As Jacob once fled to Bethel to escape the anger of his brother Esau, so now the Lord tells Jacob to return to Bethel and dwell there in the face of the trouble that his two sons, Simeon and Levi, have stirred up. When Jacob obeys and goes to Bethel, the Lord delivers him from the anger of the Canaanites who live nearby (v.5). It is significant that Jacob calls God the one "who answered me in the day of my distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone" (v.3). This epithet serves as a fitting summary of the picture of God that has emerged from these narratives. Jacob is in constant distress, yet God has always been there to deliver him.

The only previous mention of the "gods" belonging to Jacob's household appears in the story of the "household gods" (*hatt*ᵉ*rāpîm,* 31:19) that Rachel stole from her father.These may be included in the term "foreign gods" (ʾ*ĕlōhê hannēkār,* vv.2, 4); but in light of the fact that the writer mentions that they bury the "rings

in their ears" (v.4) along with these "foreign gods," it is likely that Jacob's household have picked up other religious objects while living in Shechem. In any case, the point of the narrative is to show that Jacob and his family are leaving such things behind and purifying themselves in preparation for their journey to Bethel.

6 – 15 Jacob's arrival at Bethel marks the end of his journey and the final demonstration of God's faithfulness to him. He has been with Jacob throughout his journey, and now Jacob has returned to Bethel in safety. As Abraham and Isaac did on numerous occasions, Jacob builds an altar and names it in honor of the Lord's previous appearance to him there (v.7; cf. 28:10 – 22). In response the Lord again appears to Jacob and "blesses" him (v.9).

For a second time Jacob's name is changed to "Israel" (v.10; cf. 32:28). Why twice? It is significant that there is no explanation of the name "Israel" in this second naming. Thus it appears that the negative connotation of the name Israel ("struggled with God," 32:28) has been deliberately omitted. Perhaps, then, the point of the second renaming is to erase the negative connotation of the name given in the first instance. At this point Jacob is not the same Jacob who "struggled with God and man."

The point of the second renaming, then, is to give the name "Israel" a more neutral or even a positive connotation, which it has throughout the remainder of the Torah. It does so by removing the notion of "struggle" associated with the wordplay in 32:28 and letting it stand in a positive light, in contrast to the name "Jacob" (*yaʿaqōb*)—a name frequently associated in these narratives with Jacob's deceptions (cf. comment on 27:36). In Jacob's successive names we can see the writer's assessment of Jacob's changing standing before God.

The importance of God's words to Jacob in vv.11 – 12 cannot be overemphasized. First, the words "be fruitful and increase in number" clearly recall the primeval blessing of creation (1:28) and hence show God still "at work" in bringing about the blessing to all humanity through Jacob. Second, for the first time since 17:16 ("kings of peoples will come from her") the mention is made of royalty ("kings," v.11) in the promised line. Third, the promise of the land, first given to Abraham and then to Isaac, is renewed here with Jacob (v.12). Thus within these brief words several major themes of the book come together.

The primeval blessing of humankind is renewed through the promise of a royal offspring.

In the larger course of the narrative within Genesis, this section represents a major turning point and a thematic focus.Two lines that have thus far run parallel are about to converge, and out of them both will emerge a single theme. Jacob has two wives, each representing a family line through which the promise may be carried on: the line of Rachel (the house of Joseph) and the line of Leah (the house of Judah). Just as Abraham had two sons and only one was the son through whom the promise would come, and just as Isaac had two sons and only one was the son through whom the blessing would come, so now Jacob has two wives (Leah and Rachel) and each has a son (Judah and Joseph) who can rightfully lay claim to be the "seed" of the promised blessing. In the narratives that follow, the writer holds both sons, Joseph and Judah, before the readers as legitimate heirs of the promise. In the end it will be "seed" from Judah who brings the promised blessing. He will produce the future promised king (49:8 – 12).

T. Benjamin's Birth and Rachel's Death (35:16 – 20)

[16]Then they moved on from Bethel. While they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel began to give birth and had great difficulty. [17]And as she was having great difficulty in childbirth, the midwife said to her, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son." [18]As she breathed her last — for she was dying — she named her son Ben-Oni. But his father named him Benjamin.

[19]So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). [20]Over her tomb Jacob set up a pillar, and to this day that pillar marks Rachel's tomb.

COMMENTARY

16 – 20 Rachel, Joseph's mother and Jacob's favorite wife, dies giving birth to her second son, Benjamin. The account of the birth of Jacob's youngest son is separated from the birth accounts of the rest of the sons in 29:32 – 30:24, but it

follows closely on that passage, which ended with the birth of Rachel's first son, Joseph. At the time of his birth Rachel said, "May the LORD add to me another son" (30:24). Perhaps looking back to that request, Rachel's midwife said, "Don't be afraid, for you have another son" (35:17). Benjamin is that other son.

As she is about to die, Rachel names her son "Ben-Oni," meaning "son of my trouble." Jacob, however, making a wordplay on "Oni," which can mean either "trouble" or "wealth" (cf. ʾôn, "my strength," 49:3), names him "Benjamin" (lit., "son of my right hand"), reinterpreting the name given by Rachel to mean "son of my wealth or good fortune" (Keil, 318).

It is important to the writer that the site of Rachel's burial, Ephrath, be identified with the city of Bethlehem, an important place in later biblical history (cf. 1Sa 17:12; Mic 5:2). This site is further identified by the pillar Jacob sets up to mark Rachel's grave (v.20). Some such identification of the burial place of Rachel was still known at the time of Samuel, as can be seen from the fact that Samuel told Saul to look for two men "near Rachel's tomb" (1Sa 10:2).

Although only a brief allusion to this site is made in the further narratives of Genesis (48:7), this passage continues to play an important role in later biblical texts. The prophet Jeremiah alludes to it in his description of the destruction of Jerusalem: "Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because her children are no more" (Jer 31:15); and in Micah 5:2[1] the prophet perhaps alludes to this passage in his vision of the future Davidic king. From such references it is likely that Rachel's agony in the birth of Benjamin became a picture of the painful waiting of the sons of Israel for the promised Messiah (cf. Mt 2:18).

U. The Sons of Jacob (35:21 – 26)

21 Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder.
22 While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his
father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.
Jacob had twelve sons:
23 The sons of Leah: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob, Simeon, Levi, Judah,
Issachar and Zebulun.

[24] The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.
[25] The sons of Rachel's maidservant Bilhah: Dan and Naphtali.
[26] The sons of Leah's maidservant Zilpah: Gad and Asher.
These were the sons of Jacob, who were born to him in Paddan Aram.

COMMENTARY

21 – 26 This narrative shows how the oldest sons of Jacob fall from favor because of their horrendous conduct. The writer has already recounted the violence of Simeon and Levi (ch. 34), and now he briefly the misconduct of Reuben (v.22). As the list that follows shows (vv.23 – 26), the next brother in line is Judah, the son of Leah. With these older sons out of the way, the stage is then set for the development of the lines of Judah and Joseph.

Clearly the point of the narratives is to show that Judah, not Joseph, is next in line among the brothers. Thus, although the following narratives are devoted primarily to Joseph, the writer shows considerable effort to cast Judah as the heir apparent. But the prominence Joseph receives by no means indicates the final outcome. The last words about the future of these two lines of Abraham's "seed" occur in chs. 48 and 49, where Judah is clearly the one through whom the promised "seed" will come, though Joseph will inherit the right of the firstborn. For a biblical explanation of these issues in the following narratives, see 1 Chron icles 5:1 – 2.

V. The Death of Isaac (35:27 – 29)

[27]Jacob came home to his father Isaac in Mamre, near Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron), where Abraham and Isaac had stayed. [28]Isaac lived a hundred and eighty years. [29]Then he breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people, old and full of years. And his sons Esau and Jacob buried him.

COMMENTARY

27 – 29 The end of the narratives about Jacob is marked by the death of his

father, Isaac. The purpose of this notice is not merely to record Isaac's death but also to show the complete fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob (28:21). In his initial vow at Bethel, Jacob asked that God would watch over him during his sojourn and return him safely to the house of his father. The conclusion of the narrative marks the final fulfillment of these words as Jacob returns to the house of his father, Isaac, before he dies.

NOTES

27 The back reference — אֲשֶׁר־גָּר־שָׁם אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק (*ʾšer-gār-šām ʾabrāhām wᵉyiṣḥāq,* "where Abraham and Isaac had stayed") — shows the author's concern for the interconnectedness of the events.

29 The order of the two sons—עֵשָׂו וְיַעֲקֹב (*ʿēśāw wᵉyaʿᵃqōb,* "Esau and Jacob") — reflects the order of events in the following chapters. First the events relating to Esau are covered and then those relating to Jacob.

V. THE ACCOUNT OF ESAU (36:1 – 43)

A. Esau's Journey to Seir (36:1 – 8)

[1]This is the account of Esau (that is, Edom).

[2]Esau took his wives from the women of Canaan: Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite — [3]also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth.

[4]Adah bore Eliphaz to Esau, Basemath bore Reuel, [5]and Oholibamah bore Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in Canaan.

[6]Esau took his wives and sons and daughters and all the members of his household, as well as his livestock and all his other animals and all the goods he had acquired in Canaan, and moved to a land some distance from his brother Jacob. [7]Their possessions were too great for them to remain together; the land where they were staying could not support them both because of their livestock. [8]So Esau (that is, Edom) settled in the hill country of Seir.

COMMENTARY

1 – 8 The separation of Jacob and Esau is cast in the same form as the separation of Abraham and Lot in ch. 13. The possessions of the two brothers are too great (v.7; cf. 13:6), and the land cannot sustain both of them (v.7; cf. 13:6); so just as Lot parted from Abraham and went east, so Esau parts from Jacob and goes to Seir.The heirs of the promise remain in the land, and the other son moves eastward. The writer is careful to note that their parting of ways is beneficial to both Jacob and Esau. It is because of their great wealth that they must part company.

In the rest of ch. 36 the writer shows the progress and well-being of the line of Esau. He is particularly careful to note that Esau is "Edom." The name Esau is identified by the comment, "that is, Edom" (e.g., vv.1, 8), throughout the chapter.

Why this concern? The solution lies in the future importance of Edom during the later periods of Israel's history. As the book of Obadiah demonstrates, Edom is a microcosm for Israel's relationship to all nations. In the future reign of the messianic king, Edom will once again, as in the days of David, be a part of his kingdom: "Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau. And the kingdom will be the LORD's" (Ob 21).

So also within the Pentateuch the possession of Edom is a mark of the strength and victorious reign of the "star" (*kôkāb*, Nu 24:17) that will arise or "come out of Jacob" (*miyyaʿaqôb*, Nu 24:17). It is no wonder that the NT writers look to these passages and see in "Edom" (*ʾedôm*) a promise that relates to "all humanity" (*ʾādām*) — the words are similar in Hebrew. In Acts 15:17 James identifies Amos's words, "the remnant of Edom" (Am 9:12), with "the remnant of all humanity" in the church.

NOTES

3 See the note on 28:9.

B. Esau in Seir (36:9 – 43)

9 This is the account of Esau the father of the Edomites in the hill country
of Seir. 10 These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's
wife Adah, and Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath.
11 The sons of Eliphaz:
Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam and Kenaz. 12 Esau's son Eliphaz also had a
concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek. These were grandsons of
Esau's wife Adah.
13 The sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were
grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath.
14 The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah and
granddaughter of Zibeon, whom she bore to Esau: Jeush, Jalam and Korah.
15 These were the chiefs among Esau's descendants: The sons of Eliphaz the
firstborn of Esau: Chiefs Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, 16 Korah, Gatam and

Amalek. These were the chiefs descended from Eliphaz in Edom; they were grandsons of Adah.

17 The sons of Esau's son Reuel: Chiefs Nahath, Zerah, Shammah and Mizzah. These were the chiefs descended from Reuel in Edom; they were grandsons of Esau's wife Basemath.

18 The sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah: Chiefs Jeush, Jalam and Korah. These were the chiefs descended from Esau's wife Oholibamah daughter of Anah. 19These were the sons of Esau (that is, Edom), and these were their chiefs. 20These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the region: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 21Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These sons of Seir in Edom were Horite chiefs.

22 The sons of Lotan: Hori and Homam. Timna was Lotan's sister.

23 The sons of Shobal: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho and Onam.

24 The sons of Zibeon: Aiah and Anah. This is the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the desert while he was grazing the donkeys of his father Zibeon.

25 The children of Anah: Dishon and Oholibamah daughter of Anah.

26 The sons of Dishon: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran and Keran.

27 The sons of Ezer: Bilhan, Zaavan and Akan.

28 The sons of Dishan: Uz and Aran.

29 These were the Horite chiefs: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, 30Dishon, Ezer and Dishan. These were the Horite chiefs, according to their divisions, in the land of Seir. 31These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned: 32Bela son of Beor became king of Edom. His city was named Dinhabah.

33 When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah succeeded him as king.

34 When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king.

35 When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated Midian in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king. His city was named Avith.

36 When Hadad died, Samlah from Masrekah succeeded him as king.

37 When Samlah died, Shaul from Rehoboth on the river succeeded him as king.

38 When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor succeeded him as king.

39 When Baal-Hanan son of Acbor died, Hadad succeeded him as king.

His city was named Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred, the daughter of MeZahab. [40]These were the chiefs descended from Esau, by name, according to their clans and regions: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, [41]Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, [42]Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, [43]Magdiel and Iram. These were the chiefs of Edom, according to their settlements in the land they occupied. This was Esau the father of the Edomites.

COMMENTARY

9 – 14 The rest of ch. 36 contains an unusually long list of the "genealogy" of Esau. It is made of several smaller lists.Viewed as a whole, a single and coherent line of thought is apparent throughout the list. It reveals a conscious effort on the part of the narrative to present the family of Esau as a coherent and distinct whole (Westermann, 686).

There is first a list of the names of the sons of Esau (vv.9 – 14), largely dependent on the brief narratives regarding Esau's wives (26:34; 28:9; 36:3; see note on 28:9).Verse 10 divides the sons of Esau into two groups: the sons of Adah and the sons of Basemath. Adah's sons (and grandsons) are listed in vv.11 – 12, then Basemath's in v.13, and finally Oholibamah's in v.14. Oholibamah is not mentioned at the top of the list in v.10 but is named in v.5.

15 – 19 These verses enumerate the tribal "chiefs" of the sons of Esau, beginning with the eldest, Eliphaz, and again grouped according to their mothers: Adah (vv.15b – 16), Basemath (v.17), and Oholibamah (v.18). The term "chief " (*allûp*; GK 477) is used in the Bible only for the tribal leaders of Edom, with the exception of Zechariah 12:5 – 6, where it is also used of the leaders of Judah. The word is also found outside the Bible to refer to the leaders of foreign nations (U. Cassuto, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* [Jerusalem: Instituti Bialik, 1955], 1:332). The title "chief " would have denoted primarily a political or military leader (viz., "tribal chief," KB, 53; Westermann, 687). The names are virtually the same in both lists, except for Korah in v.16a, who is not in the first list (v.11), and the reversal of the order of Kenaz and Gatam.

20 – 30 To the two lists above is added a list of "the sons of Seir the Horite, who were living in the region" (vv.20 – 28), and then a list of their tribal "chiefs"

(vv.29 – 30). Seir is ordinarily the name of the geographical territory occupied by the Edomites (BDB, 973), but here it refers to an individual. He and his descendants are listed here because they occupy the territory of Edom. In 2 Chronicles 25:11, 14, the “sons of Seir” are called “Edomites.”

Verse 20 identifies Seir as a “Horite,” which earlier commentators interpreted as “cave dwellers” based on the similarity of the word “Horite” to the Hebrew word *h.or* , meaning “cave” (cf. 1Sa 14:11). Though often rejected by modern lexicographers (e.g., KB, 339), there is a growing opinion among recent commentators that the older commentators may have been correct (Speiser, 283).

31 – 39 The list of Edomite kings in vv.31 – 39 is introduced by the heading, “These were the kings who reigned in Edom before any Israelite king reigned” (see Notes).

40 – 43 The chapter closes with a final list of the tribal “chiefs” of Esau’s clan. Several names in this list overlap with those in vv.10 – 14.

31 The expression לִפְנֵי מְלֹךְ־מֶלֶךְ לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (*lipnê mᵉlok-melek libnê yiśrāʾēl,* “before any Israelite king reigned”) presupposes a knowledge of kingship in Israel, or at least an anticipation of the kingship. Thus it is a part of those texts in Genesis (e.g., 17:6, 16; 35:11) that look forward to the promises of 49:10; Numbers 24:7, 17 - 18; and Deuteronomy 17:14 - 20 (cf. 1Sa 2:10). Note that there is no mention of the death of the last king in the list, הֲדַר (*hᵃdar*, “Hadar,” v.39), or הָדַד (*hᵃdad*, “Hadad”), as he is called in 1 Chronicles 1:50, whereas in the Chronicles passage וַיָּמָת הָדָד (*wayyāmot hᵃdad*, “Hadad also died”) is added. This suggests that the list in Genesis assumes that *hᵃdar* is still alive and that the Chronicles passage is intended to bring the list up to date.

VI. THE ACCOUNT OF JACOB (37:1 – 49:33)

A. Jacob in the Land (37:1)

[1]Jacob lived in the land where his father had stayed, the land of Canaan.

COMMENTARY

1 Verse 1 belongs structurally to the preceding narrative as a conclusion to the story of Jacob (note the similarity in structure between 37:1 – 2 and 25:11 – 12). Jacob is back in the Promised Land but is still a sojourner like his father Isaac. God's promises have not yet been completely fulfilled and Jacob is still waiting, as his fathers before him had done. It is from a verse such as this that the NT writers considered the patriarchs as "aliens and strangers on earth" (Heb 11:13).

The setting of these narratives is not settled. There is constant movement and change. For that reason this verse also provides a fitting transition to the next section, the narratives about Joseph, which trace the course of events by which the sons of Jacob leave the Promised Land and enter Egypt. According to 25:11 Jacob's father, Isaac, dwelt in Beer Lahai Roi, which is evidently where Jacob now lives.

B. Joseph's Dreams (37:2 – 11)

[2]This is the account of Jacob.
Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

[3]Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. [4]When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

[5]Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more. [6]He said to them, “Listen to this dream I had: [7]We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it.”

[8]His brothers said to him, “Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?” And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

[9]Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers.“Listen,” he said, “I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me.”

[10]When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, “What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?” [11]His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

COMMENTARY

2 – 3a The formal title of the section reads,“This is the account of Jacob” (v.2a). As v.2b suggests, the narrative introduced by this title is not about Jacob as such but about Joseph; and as we will see, it is also about Judah.

The writer immediately begins to tell the story of Joseph, starting with a number of pertinent details. He is seventeen years old. Along with his brothers, he is a shepherd of his father’s sheep; he is only a young lad (ʿallûp; compared with his other brothers. Most important, the writer relays a brief account of Joseph’s bringing of a “bad (rāʿâ) report” to his father about his brothers; then he adds that his father, Jacob, loved him more than the other brothers because he was the son born to him in his old age (v.3a).

In the context of the preceding narratives about Jacob, we saw that Jacob’s special love for Rachel (“And he loved Rachel more than Leah,” 29:30) carried over to her son, Joseph (“Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons,” 37:3a). Since the telling of the story of Joseph is filled with narrative devices such as wordplays and plot reversals, it seems likely that the reference to the “bad (rāʿâ) report” in v.2 foreshadows the brothers’ intended “evil” (rāʿâ; NIV,

“harm”) spoken of in 50:20.

3b – 11 The “richly ornamented robe” (v.3b) that Jacob made for Joseph visually illustrates the father’s preferential love for Joseph — thus the writer’s frequent return to the coat in the remainder of the story (vv.23, 31 – 33). That preferential treatment of Joseph is the problem that initiates the story, for it angers Joseph’s brothers and turns them against him (v.4). Their anger results in a plan to do away with him altogether (v.18).

But first, adding to their hatred, Joseph recounts two dreams to his brothers, both of which end with the image of his brothers as “bowing down” (*wattištaḥᵃweynā*, v.7; *mištaḥᵃwîm*, v.9; *l’hištaḥᵃwōt*, v.10) to him.The picture of the brothers as bowing before Joseph foreshadows the conclusion of the story where, because he has become ruler of Egypt, his brothers “bow down” (*wayyištaḥᵃwû*, 42:6) to him. On that occasion, the narrative reminds us, Joseph “remembered his dreams about them” (42:9).

Ironically, within the compositional strategy of Genesis this picture of Joseph and his brothers foreshadows even further the relationship between Judah and his brothers as pictured in Jacob’s last words in 49:8: “Judah . . . your father’s sons will bow down to you” (*yištaḥᵃwû*). For the writer of this book, Judah transcends Joseph, just as the blessing received by Joseph’s sons in ch. 48 is transcended by that of Judah in ch. 49.

The fact that Joseph has two dreams that foreshadow his future ascendancy is to be understood in the light of Joseph’s own words in ch. 41. There he explains to Pharaoh, “The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms [*paʿᵃmāyim*, lit., ‘twice’] is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon” (41:32). So here the matter is settled already at the beginning of the story: God will surely bring to pass the fulfillment of Joseph’s dream. The writer is careful to show throughout this narrative that Joseph’s dreams do, in fact, come to pass. With so many clues given out by the author, the reader is never in doubt as to the outcome.

The significance of the dreams is stated in the words of Joseph’s brothers: “Will you actually rule us?” (v.8). This reveals that the sense of the “bowing down” (v.10) is an acknowledgment of royalty and kingship. The ultimate irony

is that in the end such royal honor does not reside in the house of Joseph but in the house of Judah (see 49:10). Here the larger narrative takes over and assures that the outcome of events leads to the house of Judah and its king.

2 - 3 The syntax W + X + QATAL suggests that these clauses are describing the background of the events to follow. There is perhaps a wordplay between נַעַר (*naʿar,* "young man") and רָעָה (*rāʿâ,*' "bad") that serves to link further the clauses.

3 The meaning of כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים (*kᵉtōnet passîm;* NIV, "richly ornamented robe") is "a coat of extended length" (lit., a coat that extends to the hands and feet, *passîm*). The idea of a "coat of many colors" comes from the early versions: LXX (χιτῶνα ποικίλον, *chitōna poikilon*); Palestinian Targum (פַּרְגּוֹד מְצוּיָיר, *pargôd meṣûyāyr,* "many colored coat"; Vulgate ("*tunicam polymitam*"). The only other occurrence of this phrase is in 2 Sam uel 13:18 - 19, where it refers to the "kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore."

C. Joseph's Journey to Egypt (37:12 – 36)

12 Now his brothers had gone to graze their father's flocks near Shechem,
13 and Israel said to Joseph, "As you know, your brothers are grazing the flocks near Shechem. Come, I am going to send you to them."

"Very well," he replied.

14 So he said to him, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flocks, and bring word back to me." Then he sent him off from the Valley of Hebron.

When Joseph arrived at Shechem, 15 a man found him wandering around in the fields and asked him, "What are you looking for?"

16 He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers. Can you tell me where they are grazing their flocks?"

17 "They have moved on from here," the man answered. "I heard them say, 'Let's go to Dothan.' "

So Joseph went after his brothers and found them near Dothan. 18 But they saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him.

19“Here comes that dreamer!” they said to each other. 20“Come now, let’s
kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns and say that a ferocious
animal devoured him. Then we’ll see what comes of his dreams.”

21When Reuben heard this, he tried to rescue him from their hands.
“Let’s not take his life,” he said. 22“Don’t shed any blood. Throw him into
this cistern here in the desert, but don’t lay a hand on him.” Reuben said
this to rescue him from them and take him back to his father.

23So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe —
the richly ornamented robe he was wearing — 24and they took him and
threw him into the cistern. Now the cistern was empty; there was no water
in it.

25As they sat down to eat their meal, they looked up and saw a caravan of
Ishmaelites coming from Gilead. Their camels were loaded with spices,
balm and myrrh, and they were on their way to take them down to Egypt.

26Judah said to his brothers, “What will we gain if we kill our brother and
cover up his blood? 27Come, let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our
hands on him; after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood.” His
brothers agreed.

28So when the Midianite merchants came by, his brothers pulled Joseph
up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty shekels of silver to the
Ishmaelites, who took him to Egypt.

29When Reuben returned to the cistern and saw that Joseph was not there,
he tore his clothes. 30He went back to his brothers and said, “The boy isn’t
there! Where can I turn now?”

31Then they got Joseph’s robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in
the blood. 32They took the ornamented robe back to their father and
said,“We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son’s robe.”

33He recognized it and said, “It is my son’s robe! Some ferocious animal
has devoured him. Joseph has surely been torn to pieces.”

34Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son
many days. 35All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he
refused to be comforted. “No,” he said, “in mourning will I go down to the
grave to my son.” So his father wept for him.

36Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of
Pharaoh’s officials, the captain of the guard.

COMMENTARY

12 – 18 After a minor difficulty in which Joseph temporarily loses his way and has to seek help from a stranger, he finds his brothers in Dothan. The purpose of this account of Joseph's quest for his brothers can be seen by comparing it with the brief and similar prelude to the second part of the story in which he meets his brothers in Egypt (chs. 42 – 44). The symmetry of the two passages and the verbal and thematic parallels serve to reinforce the sense in the narrative that every event is providentially ordered.

Here at the beginning of the story about Joseph, when his brothers "see (*wayyirʾû*, v.18) him approaching, they "plot" (*wayyitnakkᵉlû*) to kill him. In the same way midway through the narrative, when Joseph first "sees" (*wayyarʾ*, 42:7) his brothers in Egypt, he eludes them by "disguising himself " (*wayyitnakkēr*, 42:7; NIV, "pretended to be a stranger") so that they do not recognize him, and then plans a scheme that, at least on the surface, looks as though he intends to kill them (*wᵉlōʾ tāmûtû*, 42:20; NIV, "that you may not die"). As with many biblical narratives, the literary pattern of these narratives is woven into the structures of the world itself. They show that God was at work in everyday events to bring about his purposes.

19 – 36 The details of the brother's plans are given as well as their motivation. Behind their plans lie Joseph's two dreams. Little do they suspect that the very plans they are scheming will lead to the fulfillment of those dreams. In every detail of the narrative the writer's purpose shows through, that is, to demonstrate the truthfulness of Joseph's final words to his brothers: "You intended it to harm me, but God intended it for good" (50:20).

The first plan is simply "to kill him" (*wᵉnahargēhû*, 37:20), throw his body in a pit, and then tell their father that an "evil" (*rāʿâ*; NIV, "ferocious") animal had eaten him. Again the brothers punctuate their plan with a reference to Joseph's dreams in an obviously ironic statement: "Then we'll see what comes of his dreams" (v.20; cf. 42:9). This initial plan, however, is interrupted by Reuben, who, the writer tells us, plans to save Joseph from their hands (vv.21 – 22).

The reference to Reuben is countered later in the narrative by a similar reference to Judah (v.26). The writer apparently wants to show that it is not

merely Reuben who saves Joseph from the plan of his brothers but that Judah also plays an important role. Again we can see the central importance of Jacob's last words regarding Judah in 49:8 – 12. In the end Judah is placed at the center of the narrative's focus on the fulfillment of the divine blessing. It is the descendants of Judah who will ultimately figure in the coming of the promised seed.

Reuben persuades the brothers merely to throw Joseph into a pit and, apparently, leave him to die (vv.21 – 22a). However, his actual plan is to return later and rescue Joseph (v.22b). Reuben's plan is partly successful. The brothers throw Joseph into the pit alive and leave him there. The reference to Joseph's coat, by turning our attention again briefly to the earlier events of the narrative, highlights the central point of the story; the present plan is part of a larger divine plan foreshadowed in Joseph's dreams.

The story takes an important turn with the arrival of the "Ishmaelites," who are carrying spices down to Egypt (v.25). The "Ishmaelites" become the occasion for Judah to enter the story and rescue Joseph. His suggestion is that, rather than letting Joseph die (*nakʰrōg*, v.26) in the pit, they should "sell him to the Ishmaelites" (v.27). Only a cursory account of Joseph's fate follows in the text. On the arrival of the Ishmaelites, whom the writer also calls "Midianites" in this narrative, Joseph is sold for twenty shekels (v.28) and taken to Egypt.

When the narrative refocuses on Reuben and the outcome of his plan to deal with Joseph, ironically it serves to underscore the role of Judah in the actual rescue of Joseph.Verse 29 suggests that Reuben has no part in the plan to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelites. He returns to the pit expecting to find Joseph and to rescue him, but Joseph is not there. Reuben's surprise is shown in his rage when he sees that Joseph is gone. Ultimately the brothers must fall back on their original plan of telling their father that a "ferocious" (*rāʿâ*, lit., "evil"; 37:33) animal has killed Joseph.

Once again the coat Jacob gave Joseph provides the narrative link in the story. The symbol of the brothers' original hatred for Joseph becomes the means of the father's recognition of his loss. In the end the bloodstained coat is all that remains of Joseph, and on seeing it Jacob tears off his own coat and exchanges it for sackcloth (v.34). Thus Jacob's fate and that of his sons is briefly sketched in

this opening narrative.

What happens to Joseph foreshadows all that will happen to the sons of Jacob. They will be carried into Egypt and will be put into slavery. In this sense, then, Jacob's final words set the focus of the narratives to follow: "in mourning will I go down [*,eìreìd]* to the grave [Sheol] to my son" (v.35). Ironically, the narratives about Joseph conclude with Jacob's going down (*mēr^ᵉdâ*, 46:3 – 4) to Egypt to see his son and then end with his own death (50:24 – 26).

NOTES

25 - 36 Three groups of peoples are mentioned in connection with Joseph's journey to Egypt: יִשְׁמְעֵאלִים (*yišm^ᵉʿēʾlîm*, "the Ishmaelites," vv.25, 27), מִדְיָנִים (*midyānîm*, "the Midianites," v.28), and הַמְּדָנִים (*hamm^ᵉdānîm*, "the Medanites," v.36 [NIV mg.]). The difference in spelling between *midyānîm* and *hamm^ᵉdānîm* is slight; following the LXX and other early versions, *hamm^ᵉdānîm* is often read as *hammidyānîm* (e.g., NIV). According to 25:2, however, the *m^ᵉdānîm* and the *midyānîm* are two distinct groups, and the early versions do not offer a better reading on textual grounds. To complicate the matter, 39:1 credits the *hayyišm^ᵉʿēʾlîm* with bringing Joseph to Egypt rather than the *midyānîm* or the *m^ᵉdānîm*.

We should leave the text as it stands, with three groups, and see the variations in names in the light of such texts as Judges 7:8 - 12, where the "camp of Midian" (מַחֲנֵה מִדְיָן, *malḥ^ᵃnēh midyān*) is said to be made up of "the Midianites [*midyān*], the Amalekites and all the other eastern peoples [*wᵉkol-bᵉnê-qedem*]," and Judges 8:24, where these same peoples are generically referred to as "Ishmaelites" (*yišm^ᵉʿēʾlîm*).

36 The mention of Potiphar, the captain of the guard, serves as a link to ch. 39, where it is repeated again after the interruption of ch. 38. Verse 36 thus presupposes ch. 38 and prepares the reader for the transition back to the story line of Joseph.

D. Judah and Tamar (38:1 – 30)

[1]At that time, Judah left his brothers and went down to stay with a man
of Adullam named Hirah. [2]There Judah met the daughter of a Canaanite
man named Shua. He married her and lay with her; [3]she became pregnant
and gave birth to a son, who was named Er. [4]She conceived again and gave
birth to a son and named him Onan. [5]She gave birth to still another son and
named him Shelah. It was at Kezib that she gave birth to him.

[6]Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn, and her name was Tamar. [7]But Er,
Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the LORD's sight; so the LORD put him to
death.

[8]Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your
duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother." [9]But
Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his
brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep from producing
offspring for his brother. [10]What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so
he put him to death also.

[11]Judah then said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, "Live as a widow in your
father's house until my son Shelah grows up." For he thought, "He may die
too, just like his brothers." So Tamar went to live in her father's house.

[12]After a long time Judah's wife, the daughter of Shua, died. When Judah
had recovered from his grief, he went up to Timnah, to the men who were
shearing his sheep, and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went with him.

[13]When Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is on his way to Timnah to
shear his sheep," [14]she took off her widow's clothes, covered herself with a
veil to disguise herself, and then sat down at the entrance to Enaim, which
is on the road to Timnah. For she saw that, though Shelah had now grown
up, she had not been given to him as his wife.

[15]When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had
covered her face. [16]Not realizing that she was his daughter-in-law, he went
over to her by the roadside and said, "Come now, let me sleep with you."
"And what will you give me to sleep with you?" she asked. [17]"I'll send you
a young goat from my flock," he said. "Will you give me something as a
pledge until you send it?" she asked. [18]He said, "What pledge should I give
you?" "Your seal and its cord, and the staff in your hand," she answered. So
he gave them to her and slept with her, and she became pregnant by him.
[19]After she left, she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again.

[20]Meanwhile Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite in

order to get his pledge back from the woman, but he did not find her. [21]He asked the men who lived there, “Where is the shrine prostitute who was beside the road at Enaim?” “There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here,” they said.

[22]So he went back to Judah and said, “I didn’t find her. Besides, the men who lived there said, ‘There hasn’t been any shrine prostitute here.’ ”

[23]Then Judah said, “Let her keep what she has, or we will become a laughingstock. After all, I did send her this young goat, but you didn’t find her.”

[24]About three months later Judah was told, “Your daughter-in-law Tamar is guilty of prostitution, and as a result she is now pregnant.” Judah said, “Bring her out and have her burned to death!”

[25]As she was being brought out, she sent a message to her father-in-law. “I am pregnant by the man who owns these,” she said. And she added, “See if you recognize whose seal and cord and staff these are.”

[26]Judah recognized them and said, “She is more righ teous than I, since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not sleep with her again.

[27]When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. [28]As she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand; so the midwife took a scarlet thread and tied it on his wrist and said, “This one came out first.” [29]But when he drew back his hand, his brother came out, and she said, “So this is how you have broken out!” And he was named Perez. [30]Then his brother, who had the scarlet thread on his wrist, came out and he was given the name Zerah.

COMMENTARY

1 – 11 The narrative of ch. 38 has only a loose connection with the story of Joseph. The first verse notes only that these events occurred “at the same time” (*bāʿēt hahiwʾ*; NIV, “at that time”). Without this remark we would have little basis for relating these events to the story of Joseph. In the overall strategy of the book, however, this chapter plays a crucial role. The observation that the narrative lies outside the course of events of the story of Joseph shows that the writer has brought it here for a special purpose. It plays an important part in the development of the central themes of the book.

As elsewhere in Genesis, the narrative begins with the mention of three sons (cf. the three sons of Adam, Noah, and Terah). Two of the sons die because of the evil (*raʿ*, NIV, "were wicked," vv.7, 10) they did; thus the offspring of the tribe of Judah is ultimately put into jeopardy. If these sons have no children, who will prolong the seed? The point of this introductory information is to show that the continuation of the house of Judah lies in Judah's hands, but more importantly in God's hands.

The narrative that follows shows that Judah does nothing to further the offspring of his own household. It takes the "righteous ness" (*ṣādᵉqâ*) of Tamar (v.26) to preserve the seed of Judah. A nearly identical theme is found in the book of Ruth (4:18), which itself alludes to this chapter of Genesis. The story of ch. 38, then, is much like the other "patriarchal" narratives outside the story of Joseph, which show the promised offspring in jeopardy and the patriarch showing little concern for its preservation. Just as in ch. 20, where the seed of Abraham was protected by the "righteous" (*ṣaddîq*, 20:4; NIV, "innocent") Abimelech (cf. also 26:9 – 11), it is the woman Tamar, not the patriarch Judah, who ultimately takes the initiative for the survival of the descendants of his house.

The text is not clear from whose house Jacob originally takes Tamar for his son's wife (v.6). Since we are told that Judah's own wife is a Canaanite (v.2), had Tamar also been a Canaanite, this information would presumably have been mentioned.

12 – 26 Tamar's plan resembles that of Jacob and Rebekah (ch. 27). Through a disguise she obtains a part in the blessing of the firstborn. In so doing, as with Jacob and Rebekah, she obtains that which the patriarch should have rightfully given. Selah, the son of Judah, is of age (v.14), and Tamar should have been given to him for a wife (v.11). Thus in the end, the continuation of the line of Judah is not due to the righteous actions of the patriarch Judah but rather lies in the hands of the "righteous" Tamar. Such has been a recurring theme in the patriarchal narratives.

27 – 30 The narratives about Jacob reach a fitting summary in this brief account of the birth of the two sons Perez and Zerah. The narrative began with an account of the struggle of the twins Jacob and Esau (25:22); now the

conclusion is marked by a similar struggle between twins. In both cases the struggle results in a reversal of the right of the firstborn and the focus of the blessing — the younger gains the upper hand over the older. As Jacob struggled with Esau and overcame him, so Perez overcomes Zerah, the older, and gains the right of the firstborn (vv.28 – 29, where Perez is regarded as the firstborn; cf. Nu 26:20).The brevity and austerity with which the narrative is recounted gives an impression that the meaning of the passage is self-evident to the reader. Indeed, coming as it does on the heels of a long series of reversals in which the younger gains the upper hand on the older, its sense is, to say the least, transparent.

NOTES

1 The phrase בָּעֵת הַהִוא (*bāʿēt hahiuʾ*, "At that time") links to the surrounding narrative, though only in a general way. The writer appears intent on not drawing the chronological context too tightly around the story in ch. 38. The general sense of *bāʿēt hahiuʾ* can be seen in comparison with the more definite בְּעֶצֶם הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה (*bᵉʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*, "on that same day") in 17:26 and אַחַר הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה (*ʾaḥar haddᵉbārîm hāʾēlleh*,' "After these things") in 15:1.

The only wordplay on any of the names in this narrative is that between עֵר (*ʿēr*, "Er") and רַע (*rāʿ*, "bad").

15 - 18 The narrative at this point neither accuses Judah nor excuses his action. The text says he considered Tamar to be a זוֹנָה (*zônâ*,' "prostitute"; cf. BDB, 275, "harlot"), and she is later (vv.21 - 22) described as a קְדֵשָׁה (*qᵉdēšâ*, "shrine prostitute, harlot," BDB). Both actions are clearly condemned in the Torah:*qᵉdēšâ* (Dt 23:17 - 18, "temple prostitute") and zônâ (Dt 22:21, "by being promiscuous").

E. Joseph in the House of Potiphar (39:1 – 23)

[1]Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt. Potiphar, an Egyptian who was one of Pharaoh's officials, the captain of the guard, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had taken him there.

[2]The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered, and he lived in the house of his Egyptian master. [3]When his master saw that the LORD was with him and that the LORD gave him success in everything he did, [4]Joseph found favor in his eyes and became his attendant. Potiphar put him in charge of his househol, and he entrusted to his care everything he owned. [5]From the time he put him in charge of his household and of all that he owned, the LORD blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph. The blessing of the LORD was on everything Potiphar had, both in the house and in the field. [6]So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate.

Now Joseph was well-built and handsome, [7]and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"

[8]But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care. [9]No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" [10]And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.

[11]One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside. [12]She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

[13]When she saw that he had left his cloak in her hand and had run out of the house, [14]she called her household servants. "Look," she said to them, "this Hebrew has been brought to us to make sport of us! He came in here to sleep with me, but I screamed. [15]When he heard me scream for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

[16]She kept his cloak beside her until his master came home. [17]Then she told him this story: "That Hebrew slave you brought us came to me to make sport of me. [18]But as soon as I screamed for help, he left his cloak beside me and ran out of the house."

[19]When his master heard the story his wife told him, saying, "This is how your slave treated me," he burned with anger. [20]Joseph's master took him and put him in prison, the place where the king's prisoners were confined.

But while Joseph was there in the prison, [21]the LORD was with him; he

showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden. [22]So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. [23]The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the LORD was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.

COMMENTARY

1 Fully conscious of the intervening narrative about Judah, the text resumes the account of Joseph, taking up where ch. 37 left off. This chapter is an important interlude in which the central themes of the book are addressed. As in 37:27, those who bring Joseph to Egypt are called "Ishmaelites," Zwhile in 37:28, 36 they are "Midianites."

2 – 6 Verse 2 establishes the overall theme of the narrative: "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered." Verses 3 – 6 relate the theme to the specific series of events that follows: Joseph's blessing from the Lord is recognized by his Egyptian master, and Joseph is put in charge of his household. Joseph's sojourn in Egypt, like that of his father, Jacob, in Paddan Aram (30:27), has resulted in an initial fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:3). Thus, "the LORD blessed the house of the Egyptian because of Joseph" (39:5). Such a thematic introduction alerts the reader to the underlying lessons intended in the narrative. This is not a story of the success of Joseph; it is a story of God's faithfulness to his promises. The last comment about Joseph in this introductory section ("Joseph was well-built and handsome," v.6) sets the stage for what follows.

7 – 20 This story about Joseph reverses a well-known plot in the patriarchal narratives. Whereas it has been the beautiful wife (*yᵉpat-maʾeh*, 12:11; *ṭôbat maʾeh*, 26:7) of the patriarch who is sought by the foreign ruler, now it is Joseph, the handsome patriarch (*yᵉpēh-tōʾar wᵉpēh maʾeh*, 39:6), who is sought by the wife of the foreign ruler. This is the same theme with variations, which focus on the moral purity of Joseph.The earlier examples of the theme, which involved the patriarch's misinformation and schemes, could not have played out with Joseph.

There is thus an important contrast with Joseph. Whereas in the earlier

narratives it was either the Lord (12:17; 20:3) or the moral purity of the foreign ruler (26:10) that rescued the wife, here it is Joseph's own moral courage that saves the day. His reply explicitly lays bare his own pure motives: "How then could I do such a wicked thing [*rāʿâ*, lit., 'evil'] and sin against God?" (v.9). The additional purpose of this reversal lies in the shift of emphasis in the narratives about Joseph. Whereas in the preceding narratives the focus was on God's faithfulness in fulfilling his covenantal promises, in the story of Joseph attention is turned to the importance of the human response.

We have seen in the preceding narratives that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob repeatedly fell short of God's expectations, though, of course, they continued to have faith in God. In the narratives about Joseph, however, we do not see him fall short. On the contrary, Joseph is a striking example of one who always responds in total trust and obedience to the will of God. Behind these narratives lies an emphasis that has been little felt in the earlier stories, where the stress has been on God's overriding commitment and faithfulness to the promises.The narratives about Joseph, however, give expression to that part of the promise found in 18:19:"that they may do righteousness and justice [*ṣᵉdāqâ ûmišpāṭ*] so that the LORD may fulfill what he has promised to Abraham" (my trans.).

There is a human part to be played in the fulfillment of God's promises. When God's people respond with "righ teousness and justice," as does Joseph, their way and God's blessing will prosper.

The narratives about Joseph give balance to the narratives about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.Together the two sections show both God's faithfulness in spite of human failure and the necessity of an obedient and faithful response. The theological emphasis is remarkably similar to that of the "new covenant theology" of Jeremiah 31:31 – 34 and Ezekiel 36:22 – 32, where the two themes of divine sovereignty and human responsibility are woven together by means of the concept of God's Spirit giving to a person a "new heart" — a new heart, given by God, that responds with obedience and faith. It can hardly be accidental that in all of Genesis only Joseph is described as one who is filled with the Spirit of God (41:38). The same theological emphasis is found in Deuteronomy 30:6 – 10, where Moses grounds his hope in the future of God's promises in the divine work of giving a person a new heart.

Joseph is imprisoned through no fault of his own. In fact, the narrative is explicit in its emphasis on the total uprightness of Joseph throughout the attempted seduction by the Egyptian's wife. He is in jail because of false witness leveled against him.

21 – 23 The epilogue to the story is clear in its emphasis: God has turned an intended evil against Joseph into something good. God is with Joseph (v.21) and prospers his way. Lying behind this course of events is the lesson that the whole of the narratives about Joseph teach: "You intended to harm me [*rāʿâ*, lit., 'evil'], but God intended it for good [*ṭôb*]" (50:20). Like Daniel during the exile, Joseph suffers for doing what is right, but God turns the evil done to him into a blessing.

NOTES

1 On the relationship of the "Ishmaelites" and "Midianites," see Notes on 37:25 - 36. Verse 1 repeats much of 37:36 because of the intervening story of Judah and Tamar. The syntax of v.1 (W + X + QATAL) suggests this is background information to the story that follows.

2 The וַיְהִי (*wayʿhî*, "was") clauses in ch. 39 function essentially as W + X + QATAL clauses do in the rest of the biblical narratives, though with an additional sense of narrative summary. This stylistic feature is also known in other narratives, but it is particularly frequent in this chapter.

F. Joseph in Jail (40:1 – 23)

[1]Some time later, the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt offended their master, the king of Egypt. [2]Pharaoh was angry with his two officials, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, [3]and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the same prison where Joseph was confined. [4]The captain of the guard assigned them to Joseph, and he attended them.

After they had been in custody for some time, [5]each of the two men — the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were being held in

prison — had a dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own.

[6]When Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were dejected. [7]So he asked Pharaoh's officials who were in custody with him in his master's house,"Why are your faces so sad today?"

[8]"We both had dreams," they answered, "but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Tell me your dreams."

[9]So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream. He said to him, "In my dream I saw a vine in front of me, [10]and on the vine were three branches. As soon as it budded, it blossomed, and its clusters ripened into grapes. [11]Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup and put the cup in his hand."

[12]"This is what it means," Joseph said to him. "The three branches are three days. [13]Within three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your position, and you will put Pharaoh's cup in his hand, just as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. [14]But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison. [15]For I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews, and even here I have done nothing to deserve being put in a dungeon."

[16]When the chief baker saw that Joseph had given a favorable interpretation, he said to Joseph, "I too had a dream: On my head were three baskets of bread. [17]In the top basket were all kinds of baked goods for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating them out of the basket on my head."

[18]"This is what it means," Joseph said. "The three baskets are three days. [19]Within three days Pharaoh will lift off your head and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat away your flesh."

[20]Now the third day was Pharaoh's birthday, and he gave a feast for all his officials. He lifted up the heads of the chief cupbearer and the chief baker in the presence of his officials: [21]He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, so that he once again put the cup into Pharaoh's hand, [22]but he hanged the chief baker, just as Joseph had said to them in his interpretation.

[23]The chief cupbearer, however, did not remember Joseph; he forgot him.

COMMENTARY

1 – 23 Chapter 40 represents an intermediary stage in the development of the plot of the story of Joseph. Joseph has been cast into jail and has risen to a position of prominence there. We are apparently to assume that Joseph's position is responsible for his being assigned to wait on the two royal officials (vv.1 – 4). They each have a dream, which Joseph correctly interprets but ultimately to no avail, since the surviving official soon forgets the whole affair.

What is the writer's purpose in including at such great length the events of this part of the narrative? First, in the rest of the story, when Pharaoh himself has a dream, the butler remembers these very events and tells the king about Joseph. From that perspective, the events recorded here prove decisive. Why such detail regarding each dream? Why the elevated style in the telling and retelling of the story? The writer clearly wants to impress on the reader the picture of Joseph that comes through these events. It is a Joseph who, like Daniel, is an interpreter of dreams and mysteries. He discerns the course of future events that to others lie hidden. Even when we, the readers, hear the dreams recounted, we are at a loss to find their meaning. Only Joseph knows it.

The sense of the cupbearer's dream may seem self-evident, but as the baker's dream shows, self-evident meanings are by no means certain. One must have great discernment to understand the meaning of these dreams. Who can, on the face of it, discern the meanings of the two dreams? One is favorable and the other is not. There is clearly more to the dreams than a plain reading of each would suggest. The picture of Joseph that emerges is precisely that which Pharaoh later expresses: Joseph is "one in whom is the spirit of God" (41:38). He knows the interpretations of dreams, which, in his own words,"belong to God" (40:8).This sets Joseph apart from those who have preceded him in this book. He is "discerning" and "wise" (41:39), and "things turned out exactly as he interpreted them" (41:13). Whereas Abraham was a "prophet" (20:7), Joseph is a "wise man." Whereas Abraham saw the course of future events "in a vision" (15:1), Joseph discerns the course of the future in the mysterious dreams of others.

What lies behind the writer's portrayal of Joseph in these terms? Why the contrast with Abraham? The answer may lie in the perspective of the Pentateuch in general. As the last chapters of Deuteronomy show, the Pentateuch addresses

itself to an audience that has seen the passing of Moses, the great prophet (Dt 34:10), and yet has not seen the fulfillment of his great prophecies. Much lies ahead yet to be fulfilled. It is to this audience that the leadership of Joshua is presented, not as a prophet but as one "filled with the spirit of wisdom" (Dt 34:9), a "wise man" like Joseph.

Joseph represents the kind of leadership the readers of the Pentateuch will be called on to provide and follow. He is a leader like Daniel, who needs to "discern" (cf. Da 9:2) the visions of the prophets to find the course of God's future dealings with his people. He does not have to wait on new prophecies. His task is to discern the meaning of the old. Joseph, like Solomon, is a picture of a truly wise leader who understands and sees the will of God in the affairs of those around him. In this sense Joseph stands as a prototype of all the later wise men of Israel. All future leaders must stand the test of measurement against him. It is hardly surprising that one sees foreshadowed in the picture of Joseph elements that later resemble David, Solomon, and, ultimately, the Messiah himself.

NOTES

15 גֻּנֹּבְתִּי מֵאֶרֶץ הָעִבְרִים (*gunnabtî mēʾereṣ hāʿibrîm,*) "I was forcibly carried off from the land of the Hebrews") refers back to the narrative of ch. 37 and shows the unity of the story. Such references are common in the story of Joseph.

G. Joseph's Interpretation of Pharaoh's Dreams (41:1 – 36)

OVERVIEW

Joseph clearly and forthrightly expresses the central theme of ch. 41 in v.32: "the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon." As this chapter shows, the assurance that God will bring future events to pass comes from the fact that the dreams relating those events are repeated. The occurrence of "two" dreams with the same meaning shows that God will certainly bring about that which was foreseen in the dreams.

Throughout the narrative this theme is kept alive by a continuous return to the pattern of “twos.” In the previous chapter the “two” (šᵉnê, 40:2) officials of the king each had a dream. One dream was good, the other bad. The dreams and their interpretations were repeated twice, once by the writer in the narrative of ch. 40 and then again by the cupbearer before Pharaoh in vv.9 – 13. After “two years” (šᵉnātayîm, v.1), the king himself has “two” (šēnît, v.5) dreams; one part of each dream is good (“years of great abundance,” v.29) and the other bad (“years of famine,” vv.27, 30). Within the narrative, each of the two dreams is recounted twice — once by the narrator (vv.1 – 7) and a second time by Pharaoh (vv.17 – 24). When the dream is “repeated” (hiššānôt, v.32), it is to show that the matter “has been firmly decided” and that “God will do it soon.” Such symmetry in human events is evidence of a divine work. The writer, along with Joseph, is able to see the handiwork of God in the events he recounts. It is this vision that he passes along to the readers in these subtle interplays within the text itself.

[1]When two full years had passed, Pharaoh had a dream: He was standing
by the Nile, [2]when out of the river there came up seven cows, sleek and fat,
and they grazed among the reeds. [3]After them, seven other cows, ugly and
gaunt, came up out of the Nile and stood beside those on the riverbank.
[4]And the cows that were ugly and gaunt ate up the seven sleek, fat cows.
Then Pharaoh woke up.

[5]He fell asleep again and had a second dream: Seven heads of grain,
healthy and good, were growing on a single stalk. [6]After them, seven other
heads of grain sprouted — thin and scorched by the east wind. [7]The thin
heads of grain swallowed up the seven healthy, full heads. Then Pharaoh
woke up; it had been a dream.

[8]In the morning his mind was troubled, so he sent for all the magicians
and wise men of Egypt. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but no one could
interpret them for him.

[9]Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, “Today I am reminded of my
shortcomings.

[10]Pharaoh was once angry with his servants, and he imprisoned me and
the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. [11]Each of us had a
dream the same night, and each dream had a meaning of its own. [12]Now a
young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. We
told him our dreams, and he interpreted them for us, giving each man the

interpretation of his dream. [13]And things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us: I was restored to my position, and the other man was hanged. ”

[14]So Pharaoh sent for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon. When he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came before Pharaoh.

[15]Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream, and no one can interpret it. But I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it.”

[16]“I cannot do it,” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.”

[17]Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, [18]when out of the river there came up seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. [19]After them, seven other cows came up — scrawny and very ugly and lean. I had never seen such ugly cows in all the land of Egypt. [20]The lean, ugly cows ate up the seven fat cows that came up first. [21]But even after they ate them, no one could tell that they had done so; they looked just as ugly as before. Then I woke up.

[22]“In my dreams I also saw seven heads of grain, full and good, growing on a single stalk. [23]After them, seven other heads sprouted — withered and thin and scorched by the east wind. [24]The thin heads of grain swallowed up the seven good heads. I told this to the magicians, but none could explain it to me.”

[25]Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one and the same. God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do. [26]The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good heads of grain are seven years; it is one and the same dream. [27]The seven lean, ugly cows that came up afterward are seven years, and so are the seven worthless heads of grain scorched by the east wind: They are seven years of famine.

[28]“It is just as I said to Pharaoh: God has shown Pharaoh what he is about to do. [29]Seven years of great abundance are coming throughout the land of Egypt, [30]but seven years of famine will follow them. Then all the abundance in Egypt will be forgotten, and the famine will ravage the land. [31]The abundance in the land will not be remembered, because the famine that follows it will be so severe. [32]The reason the dream was given to Pharaoh in two forms is that the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon.

[33]"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt. [34]Let Pharaoh appoint commissioners over the land to take a fifth of the harvest of Egypt during the seven years of abundance. [35]They should collect all the food of these good years that are coming and store up the grain under the authority of Pharaoh, to be kept in the cities for food. [36]This food should be held in reserve for the country, to be used during the seven years of famine that will come upon Egypt, so that the country may not be ruined by the famine."

COMMENTARY

1 – 8 Pharaoh's two dreams are seemingly more transparent than those of the two officials. The sense of the two dreams can be seen in the internal elements of each dream. Seven good cows and seven good heads of grain are seven good years. Seven bad cows and seven blighted heads of grain are seven bad years to follow. However, the dreams' simplicity appears to conceal rather than reveal their meaning. To show this, the writer tells us that all the king's magicians and wise men are unable to interpret the meaning of the dreams (v.8). The inability of the court officials to do so is duplicated later in the account of the officials in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, who also prove powerless in the face of the king's mysterious dreams (Da 2:4 – 12). In their case, however, to ensure against fraud, they had not only to interpret the dream but to recount it as well.

Joseph's interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams differs from Daniel's in that not only does he have to forecast from the dreams what is to happen, but, more importantly, he must advise Pharaoh how to prepare for what is to come. Thus Joseph's wisdom in this situation, forecast in the dreams, is portrayed as of equal importance to the interpretation of the dreams. His is a wisdom that consists as much in planning and administration as in knowledge of secret mysteries.

9 – 13 In the words of the cupbearer the reader's attention is redirected to the first occasion of Joseph's interpretation of the dreams.Though the cupbearer has forgotten, he now recalls that Joseph's interpretation stood the test of time: "Things turned out exactly as he interpreted them to us" (v.13). As it happens, the cupbearer's forgetfulness works in Joseph's favor since, just at the opportune moment, he remembers Joseph and recommends his wisdom to the king.

With the reader's attention drawn to the events of the previous passage, both the wisdom of Joseph and the sovereign workings of God are emphasized. Joseph's wisdom is highlighted also by the fact that in contrast to the wise men of Egypt, the interpretation of Joseph, "a young Hebrew" (v.12), proves true. God's power is highlighted in the fact that though the cupbearer forgets Joseph at the time, he remembers him just at the right moment and thus serves as the means for Joseph's ultimate rise to power.

14 – 36 The Pharaoh repeats his two dreams to Joseph in virtually the same terms as the writer originally recounted them. It is not unusual for him to include such repetitions, but in each case the reader should look for the reason behind it. As is suggested above, the writer has gone out of his way to present the entire narrative in a series of "pairs" all fitting within the notion of the emphasis given by means of the repetition: "the matter has been firmly decided by God, and God will do it soon" (v.32). The repetition of the dreams, then, fits this pattern.

But there may be more to it than that. We should note that when Pharaoh repeats the dreams, he adds only two major parts: the comment in v.19b —"I had never seen such bad [*lārōaʿ*] cows in all the land of Egypt"— and the whole of v.21, stating that these cows looked just as "bad" (*raʿ*) as before they ate the good cows. In both cases the repetition stresses the "bad" (*raʿ*) of the appearance of the cows in contrast with the "good" (*haṭṭōbōt*, v.26) cows of the first group. The notion of "good" and "bad" is thus woven directly into the fabric and sense of the story.

The writer's emphasis on the "good" and "bad" represents Joseph's wisdom and discernment as an ability to distinguish between the "good" (*ṭôb*) and the "bad" (*raʿ*). Such a picture suggests that in the story of Joseph the writer is returning to one of the central themes of the beginning of the book, the knowledge of "good" (*ṭôb*) and "bad" (*raʿ*). Joseph, one who has wisdom, is able to discern between "good and bad." It is also clear from this story that ultimately such knowledge comes only from God (v.39). Joseph is the embodiment of the ideal that true wisdom, the ability to discern between "good and bad," comes only from God. Thus the lesson of the early chapters of Genesis is artfully repeated in the last chapters of Genesis.

Consistent with such an intention is the fact that at the very end of the book

(50:20), the writer returns to the picture of God so clearly portrayed at the beginning (1:1 – 31), namely, the covenantal God, who alone brings about all things for the "good" of his own. In the light of such observations, it can hardly be accidental that the following narrative picks up on this very point by recounting that Joseph's plan seemed "good" (*wayyîṭab*, v.37) to Pharaoh and all his servants.

NOTES

1 The מִקֵּץ שְׁנָתַיִם יָמִים (*miqqēṣ šᵉnātayim yāmîm*, "When two full years had passed") shows that the narrated events are closely related to one another. The mention of "two" years is in line with the use of "doubling" throughout the Joseph narrative. See comments on 41:32.

8 וַתִּפָּעֶם (*wattippāʿem*, "was troubled") anticipates and serves as a link to פַּעֲמָיִם (*paʿᵃmāyim*, "two forms," v.32).

32 See the note on 27:36. פַּעֲמָיִם (*paʿᵃmāyim*, "two forms" or "two times") is repeated again in 43:10.

H. Jacob's Exaltation over Egypt (41:37 – 57)

37 The plan seemed good to Pharaoh and to all his officials. 38 So Pharaoh
asked them, "Can we find anyone like this man, one in whom is the spirit of
God?"
39 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Since God has made all this known to
you, there is no one so discerning and wise as you. 40 You shall be in charge
of my palace, and all my people are to submit to your orders. Only with
respect to the throne will I be greater than you."
41 So Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I hereby put you in charge of the whole
land of Egypt." 42 Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his finger and put
it on Joseph's finger. He dressed him in robes of fine linen and put a gold
chain around his neck. 43 He had him ride in a chariot as his second-in-
command, and men shouted before him, "Make way!" Thus he put him in

charge of the whole land of Egypt.

[44]Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh, but without your word no one will lift hand or foot in all Egypt.” [45]Pharaoh gave Joseph the name Zaphenath-Paneah and gave him Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, to be his wife. And Joseph went throughout the land of Egypt.

[46]Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from Pharaoh’s presence and traveled throughout Egypt. [47]During the seven years of abundance the land produced plentifully. [48]Joseph collected all the food produced in those seven years of abundance in Egypt and stored it in the cities. In each city he put the food grown in the fields surrounding it. [49]Joseph stored up huge quantities of grain, like the sand of the sea; it was so much that he stopped keeping records because it was beyond measure.

[50]Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. [51]Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” [52]The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”

[53]The seven years of abundance in Egypt came to an end, [54]and the seven years of famine began, just as Joseph had said. There was famine in all the other lands, but in the whole land of Egypt there was food. [55]When all Egypt began to feel the famine, the people cried to Pharaoh for food. Then Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph and do what he tells you.”

[56]When the famine had spread over the whole country, Joseph opened the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe throughout Egypt. [57]And all the countries came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, because the famine was severe in all the world.

COMMENTARY

37 – 57 The account of the king’s appointment of Joseph over the whole of his kingdom continues to present a picture of Joseph that resembles the portrait of Adam in Genesis 1. Just as Adam is seen in the creation account as dependent on God for his knowledge of “good and bad,” so also Joseph is portrayed here in the same terms (see above comments). Just as Adam is made God’s “vicegerent” to rule over all the land, so similarly Joseph is portrayed here as Pharaoh’s

“vicegerent” over all of his land (vv.40 – 43). Just as Adam was made in God’s image to rule over all the land, so the king here gives Joseph his “signet ring” and dresses him in royal garments (v.42).

The picture of Joseph resembles the psalmist’s understanding of Genesis 1 when, regarding that passage, he writes, “[You have] crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet” (Ps 8:5 – 6). Just as God provided a wife for Adam in the garden and gave humankind all the land to enjoy, so the king gives a wife to Joseph and puts him over all the land (v.45).

What is to be made of such correspondences between Adam and Joseph? Are they intentional or coincidental? While they may be merely accidental similarities, such patterns in the description of key characters are often found in biblical texts and are by no means thematically out of place. At many points in the story, Joseph appears to be cast as the “ideal” of a truly wise and trustworthy (faithful) man. In terms of the similarities between Joseph and Adam, Joseph is a concrete model of God’s ideal Adam. Joseph is a kind of “second Adam.” In terms of the similarities between him and the future king in Genesis 49:8 – 12, Joseph is a concrete example of an ideal king.

As an ideal, Joseph accomplishes all that Adam failed to do. Whereas Adam lost the good land God prepared for him (3:24), Joseph led his people to the “good land” (45:18) God providentially prepared for them (45:7, 10). It is likely that a conscious purpose lies behind these similarities between Genesis 1 and the portrayal of Joseph in Genesis 37 – 48. His story is presented as a historical picture of what might have been, had Adam, like Joseph, remained obedient to God and trusted God for the “good.” There is already a kind of “typology” between Joseph and Adam and Joseph and the king in Genesis 49. The picture of Joseph that emerges in these narratives is an anticipation of what might still be, if God’s people would, like Joseph, trust and obey God.

A further typology between Joseph and the promised “scepter” in 49:8 – 12 is established by means of the figure of the brothers who bow down to Joseph, the true prince of Egypt. The story of Joseph is built around his two dreams of his brothers bowing down to him (37:5 – 11). Much of the story of Joseph is driven by the interpretation and fulfillment of the dreams. After Joseph told his brothers

of his dreams — in which his sheaves and the stars of the heavens bowed down to him — his father asked, “Shall I, your mother and your brothers also bow down to you?” The story of Joseph in its entirety is an answer to that question. The whole story moves toward the moment when his brothers and family bow down to him and acknowledge that he has saved their lives and provided abundantly for them.

In his prophetic poem in ch. 49, Jacob again raises the question of his sons’ bowing down to their brother. This time, however, the brother they bow down to is not Joseph but the “young lion” prince from the house of Judah. Joseph and his dreams have made way for the coming of the king of 49:8 – 10, who will defeat their foes and restore them to a bountiful land (49:11 – 12). The same is said of the “seed” of Abraham, who is a source of divine blessing for all who look to him (27:29). As we have suggested earlier, that “seed” is further identified as the king promised in the other poetic passages in the Pentateuch (see Nu 24:9).

The story of Joseph thus looks in two directions. It looks back to Adam and portrays Joseph as a renewal of God’s failed ideal. What was lost in Adam’s disobedience is recovered in Joseph’s obedience. Joseph’s life also projects itself into the future of the royal house of Judah and into the “last days” of Jacob’s vision in 49:1. Once again the details of Joseph’s life are idealized as a model of the one like him who is yet to come (see 49:8 – 12). Events in his life anticipate the coming of the royal scion from the house of Judah. Like Joseph, his brothers will bow in homage to him (37:10; 42:6; 47:31), and like Joseph, he will save his people and bring them into God’s good and bountiful land. Thus in the final shape of the narratives in Genesis, the tension between the house of Joseph and the house of Judah, which lies deep within many of these texts, is resolved by making the life of Joseph into a portrait of the one who is to reign as king from the house of Judah (cf. 49:8 – 12).

NOTES

51 The name מְנַשֶּׁה (*mᵉnaššeh,*' “Manasseh”) is linked to נַשַּׁנִי אֱלֹהִים (*naššanî ʾᵉlōhîm,*' “God has made me forget”).

52 The name אֶפְרַיִם (*ʾepnayim,* "Ephraim") is associated with הִפְרַנִי אֱלֹהִים (*hipranî ʾĕlōhîm,* "God has made me fruitful").

54 The use of the plural הָאֲרָצוֹת (*hāʾărāṣôt,* "the lands") explains the sense of the second line, וּבְכָל־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם הָיָה לָחֶם (*ûbĕkol-ʾereṣ miṣrayim hāyâ lāḥem,* "but in the whole land of Egypt there was food"). The plural "lands" refers to all the other lands (see NIV) except Egypt.

56 - 57 The use of וַיִּשְׁבֹּר (*wayyišbōr,* "and [he] sold") and לִשְׁבֹּר (*lišbōr,* "to buy") anticipates the יֶשׁ־שֶׁבֶר (*yeš-šeber,* "there was grain") of 42:1, providing a link with that chapter.

I. Joseph's Brothers in Egypt (42:1 – 28)

OVERVIEW

The preceding chapter has chronicled Joseph's rise to power. The present chapter turns to the divine purpose behind this miraculous rise. At the conclusion of this long and complicated narrative, Joseph tells his brothers the ultimate purpose of the events: "God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (45:7). Joseph is cast in the role of a savior of his people.

Though that is the primary meaning of the narrative, there are many subplots along the way. Indeed this section of Genesis is complex in both plot and motifs; and like ch. 24, it is complicated even further by numerous repetitions in the reporting of the events. Nearly every major event is recounted twice, once as the event itself is narrated and the second time by one of the leading characters in the narrative.

> [1]When Jacob learned that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you just keep looking at each other?" [2]He continued, "I have heard that there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die."

[3]Then ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt. [4]But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with the others, because he was afraid that harm might come to him. [5]So Israel's sons were among those who went to buy grain, for the famine was in the land of Canaan also.

[6]Now Joseph was the governor of the land, the one who sold grain to all its people. So when Joseph's brothers arrived, they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground. [7]As soon as Joseph saw his brothers, he recognized them, but he pretended to be a stranger and spoke harshly to them. "Where do you come from?" he asked.

"From the land of Canaan," they replied,"to buy food."

[8]Although Joseph recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. [9]Then he remembered his dreams about them and said to them, "You are spies! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

[10]"No, my lord," they answered. "Your servants have come to buy food. [11]We are all the sons of one man. Your servants are honest men, not spies."

[12]"No!" he said to them. "You have come to see where our land is unprotected."

[13]But they replied,"Your servants were twelve brothers, the sons of one man, who lives in the land of Canaan. The youngest is now with our father, and one is no more."

[14]Joseph said to them, "It is just as I told you: You are spies! [15]And this is how you will be tested: As surely as Pharaoh lives, you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. [16]Send one of your number to get your brother; the rest of you will be kept in prison, so that your words may be tested to see if you are telling the truth. If you are not, then as surely as Pharaoh lives, you are spies!" [17]And he put them all in custody for three days.

[18]On the third day, Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: [19]If you are honest men, let one of your brothers stay here in prison, while the rest of you go and take grain back for your starving households. [20]But you must bring your youngest brother to me, so that your words may be verified and that you may not die."This they proceeded to do.

[21]They said to one another, "Surely we are being punished because of our brother. We saw how distressed he was when he pleaded with us for his life, but we would not listen; that's why this distress has come upon us."

[22]Reuben replied,"Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you

wouldn’t listen! Now we must give an accounting for his blood.” [23]They did not realize that Joseph could understand them, since he was using an interpreter.

[24]He turned away from them and began to weep, but then turned back and spoke to them again. He had Simeon taken from them and bound before their eyes.

[25]Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back in his sack, and to give them provisions for their journey. After this was done for them, [26]they loaded their grain on their donkeys and left.

[27]At the place where they stopped for the night one of them opened his sack to get feed for his donkey, and he saw his silver in the mouth of his sack. [28]“My silver has been returned,” he said to his brothers.“Here it is in my sack.”

Their hearts sank and they turned to each other trembling and said, “What is this that God has done to us?”

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 At the opening of this chapter the narrative returns to Jacob, who has been offstage since 37:34. As is frequently the case in biblical narrative, the words spoken at the beginning of a story anticipate and foreshadow the outcome of the story. The events of the narrative are scripted by the words of the opening speech. Thus Jacob, on sending his sons to Egypt, says, “Go down there . . . so that we may live and not die [*wᵉnihyeh wᵉlō᾽ nāmût,* v.2] (cf. *lᵉmiḥyâ šᵉlāḥanî ᵓlōhîm,* “it was to save lives that God sent me,” 45:5).

Jacob’s words also serve to align the deeds of Joseph with the larger themes of the Pentateuch, namely, the theme of “life” (*ḥayyîm*) and “death” (*māwet*; 2:7, 9; 3:22; Dt 30:15). In so doing, the events that follow are cast as a narrative picture that shows the way to return to the gift of life that was lost in the garden. The story of Joseph is fashioned into a quest for the lost tree of life.

3 – 13 The “twelve” (*šᵉnêm ᶜāśār,* vv.13, 32) sons of Jacob are divided into two groups throughout the narrative. There are “ten [*ᵓśārâ*] brothers of Joseph” (v.3) and “two” (*šᵉnayim*) sons of Jacob by Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. These two sons of Rachel are contrasted with the two sons of Leah, viz., Reuben and Judah.

Both Reuben and Judah play an important and similar role in the narrative (cf. Reuben, vv.22, 37; Judah, 43:3, 8). They speak on behalf of the other brothers and are the catalysts in the resolution of the plots by Joseph.

It is Judah, however, who saves the day by offering himself as a pledge (ʾᵉʿerbennû, 43:9; NIV, “I . . . will guarantee”) for the young lad Benjamin; and it is Judah who repeats Jacob’s own thematic words, “that we and you and our children may live and not die” (wᵉnihyeh wᵉlōʾ nāmût, 43:8; cf. 42:2). Finally, it is Judah who speaks before Joseph and offers himself as a substitute for Benjamin, lest he cause any calamity (raʿ) to fall upon his father, Jacob (44:33 – 34).

The narrative is clearly woven around the interplay between Joseph and Judah. In the end Judah resolves the conflict. It is Joseph, however, who creates the conflict, and this he does at numerous points in the narrative.When his brothers approach to buy grain, Joseph “pretends to be a stranger” (v.7), speaks harshly, and accuses them of being spies. What motivates Joseph? Is it revenge? Is he trying to get even with his brothers for what they have done? The writer immediately brushes aside such possibilities with the comment that Joseph “remembered his dreams about them” (v.9). Thus the reader is given an important hint that Joseph’s schemes and plans against his brothers are motivated by the dreams of the earlier narratives and not by the actions his brothers took against him.

Little more is said specifically about the purpose Joseph sees in his continuous schemes against his brothers, but several subtle reminders in the narrative reveal further his intention. For example, in response to Joseph’s accusation that the brothers are spies, the brothers defend their integrity by saying, “Your servants are twelve brothers” (šᵉnêm ʿāśār ʿᵃbādeykā ʾaḥîm, 42:13; NIV, “Your servants were twelve brothers”); but lest their integrity be gainsaid, they are forced to add, “and one is no more” (wᵉhāʾeḥād ʾênennû). Joseph’s schemes have provoked the first hint that their evil deed, accomplished long past, might yet rise up against them.

As proof that this point is not lost on the brothers, the writer allows us to listen in on their own version of this event when they recount it to their father (v.32). On that occasion they report the events in a different order than that recorded in the narrative in v.13. As they tell the story slightly differently, the writer allows us to see its meaning. In the narrative version, the brothers first mention the “one

who is no more" — that is, Joseph (v.13); but when they tell their father about Joseph's accusations and their response, they mention last the "one [who] is no more" (v.32) and then tell of Benjamin who is home with their father. Though subtle, such a reversal may give a narrative clue that the memory of what they did to Joseph is beginning to bother their consciences. What Joseph has recounted prominently, they appear to minimize by putting it in the background.

Another narrative reminder that perhaps reveals Joseph's motives in perplexing his brothers is the conclusion the brothers draw from Joseph's having their money returned to them in their grain sacks. When they see their money returned, they ask, "What is this that God has done to us?" (v.28). Whatever they may have meant by this, in the sense and context of the narrative their words have an uncanny ring of truth to them. Though we the readers know it is Joseph who has the money put back into their sacks, by viewing the events from the brothers' perspective their words point us to a further possibility. This may be a work of God, which in fact confirms the direction the narrative as a whole is taking. God is at work in the schemes of Joseph, and we are allowed to see in this narrative a preliminary reminder of the ultimate theme: "God intended it for good" (50:20).

14 – 24 Joseph now devises two plans to test his brothers. The first was that "one" (ʾeḥād, v.16) of the brothers should return for the youngest and the rest remain in prison. After three days the second plan is announced, that "one" (ʾeḥād, v.19) of the brothers is to remain behind and the others are to return to get the youngest. This double plan fits into the overall narrative scheme of repetition in that for both plans it is the "one" (ʾeḥād, brother who rescues the others that is central. Within the narrative this "one" brother appears to be a thematic echo of the "one [who] is no more." It was this "one" (Joseph) also who was put into prison and left behind when the brothers returned to their father in ch. 37.

Events in the brothers' lives are beginning to echo those in their treatment of Joseph. The reality of their own lives is beginning to mirror the hidden reality of the life of Joseph. It is no wonder the brothers draw the conclusion that their present distress has been caused by the distress they brought on Joseph (vv.21 – 22).

Joseph's explanation of the change in plans also ties the narrative to the larger

themes of the book. He says about his plan, “Do this and you will live [*wihyû*, v.18] . . . that you may not die [*wihyû*, v.20],” which again aligns the narrative with the theme of “life” and “death” that runs throughout the Pentateuch (cf. 50:20: “the saving of lives”; cf. Dt 30:15). Joseph also said, “For I fear God” (v.18), which again identifies Joseph’s plans with the will of God (50:20: “God intended it for good”).

When the brothers begin to talk among themselves about the distress they brought on Joseph, the reader begins to catch a glimpse of where Joseph’s plans might be leading. Reuben’s words focus our attention on the central point of the narrative: “Now we must give an accounting for his blood” (v.22). That is just what is happening. At this point, however, we can also see that Joseph’s plans do not seek revenge for how his brothers once treated him; rather they will show how, in God’s world, the “guilt” (*ʾāšēmîm*; NIV, “we are being punished,” v.21) of the brothers has come back on their own heads and now calls for justice. The remarkable message of this narrative is that Joseph has already forgiven his brothers of the evil they did to him. As v.24 shows, Joseph must turn away from them to hide his sorrow for the distress his plan is causing. What awaits the brothers is not the “evil” (*raʿ*) they intended for Joseph but the “good” (*ṭôb*) God intends for them through Joseph (50:20).

25 – 28 Joseph’s next plan is to fill the brothers’ sacks with the money they brought to buy grain. Though nothing is said about Joseph’s intention, the words of the brothers as they discover their money are all that the narrative requires: “What is this that God has done to us?” (v.28). Once again, we as readers know that Joseph is the one who put the money in their sacks, but the brothers express an important underlying point of the narrative. God is indeed behind it all and through it is working out the divine purposes for Joseph and his brothers (cf. 50:20).

NOTES

1 תִּתְרָאוּ (*titrāʾû*) is not a common expression, as is witnessed by the diversity of translations among the versions. The versions appear to be attempts at rendering *titrāʾû* rather than offering a different text. The Hithpael is usually explained as reciprocal, viz., “keep looking at each other” (NIV). Jacob, 761, points to the

preceding וַיַּרְא (*wayyarʾ,* “When [he] learned”) and sees a contrast between Jacob’s seeing of the solution to the famine in Egypt and the sons’ seeing only of one another. However, the Hithpael can also have an iterative sense (Williams, Hebrew Syntax, 29); thus the expression may mean simply, “Why do you go on merely looking? [Do something!].”

3 לִשְׁבֹּר (*lišbōr,* “to buy”; cf. vv.5 - 6, 10) is a verbal link to the preceding narrative (*lišbōr,* 41:57).

5 כִּי־הָיָה הָרָעָב בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן (*kî-hāyâ hārāʿāb bᵉʾereṣ kᵉnāʿan,* “for the famine was in the land of Canaan also”) is not redundant but identifies for the first time הָאָרֶץ (*hāʾāreṣ,* “the land”) as *ʾereṣ kᵉnāʿan* an (“the land of Canaan”). The mention of *hārāʿāb* (“the famine”) carries the narrative along (cf. 43:1).

6 The clause “they bowed down to him with their faces to the ground” may allude to Joseph’s dreams (“and [they] bowed down,” 37:7) as well as anticipate further stages in the story: “and they bowed down before him to the ground,” 43:26).

8 Note the chiastic coordination in וַיַּכֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶת־אֶחָיו וְהֵם לֹא הִכִּרָהוּ (*wayyakkēr yôsēp ʾet-ʾeḥāyw uʾhēmlōʾ hikkiruhû,* “And Joseph recognized his brothers, but him they did not recognize”). This type of construction is frequent in Genesis and adds considerable dimension and depth to story. They allow the author to go beyond merely listing a chain of actions.

22 Reuben’s words, “Didn’t I tell you,” show how the perspective of the narrative includes the events recorded as far back as ch. 37. The writer tells the story by keeping the whole of the Joseph narrative in the reader’s mind.

23 וְהֵם לֹא יָדְעוּ (*uʾhēm lōʾ yādᵉʿû,* “They did not realize”) appears to be a comment to the reader, though its clausal structure, W + X + QATAL, suggests that it is to be understood as background information to the following narrative - it explains Joseph’s weeping over what his brothers have said.

J. Joseph’s Brothers Return for Benjamin (42:29 – 38)

[29]When they came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told
him all that had happened to them. They said, [30]"The man who is lord over
the land spoke harshly to us and treated us as though we were spying on the
land. [31]But we said to him, 'We are honest men; we are not spies. [32]We
were twelve brothers, sons of one father. One is no more, and the youngest
is now with our father in Canaan.'

[33]"Then the man who is lord over the land said to us, 'This is how I will
know whether you are honest men: Leave one of your brothers here with
me, and take food for your starving households and go. [34]But bring your
youngest brother to me so I will know that you are not spies but honest
men. Then I will give your brother back to you, and you can trade in the
land.' "

[35]As they were emptying their sacks, there in each man's sack was his
pouch of silver! When they and their father saw the money pouches, they
were frightened. [36]Their father Jacob said to them, "You have deprived me
of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more, and now you
want to take Benjamin. Everything is against me!"

[37]Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death
if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring
him back."

[38]But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is
dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you
are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow."

COMMENTARY

29 – 38 The events of ch. 42 are now retold in the words of the brothers but in an abbreviated form. Their focus is on the plan of Joseph for the return of the youngest son. We must again ask why the writer has allowed this portion of the narrative to be retold. It is, of course, necessary as a part of his overall strategy in telling the story, but what specifically does he have in mind with these details? The answer lies in Jacob's response: "You have deprived me of my children. Joseph is no more and Simeon is no more" (v.36).

As though he knows all that has happened between his sons and Joseph,

Jacob's words ring truer than he could ever have suspected. To the sons, and to the reader, his words are to the point and on target. The brothers have deprived him of Joseph, and it is because of them that Simeon is not now with them and that Benjamin is to be taken away. Thus now, in the words of their father, they are confronted once again with the lingering guilt of their treatment of Joseph.

In the face of Jacob's words, Reuben's response is unusual: "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you" (v.37). Reuben certainly means for his words to ensure confidence in his own resolve to return Benjamin; but within the context of the larger narrative about Joseph, they only add insult to injury. Jacob's reply to Reuben not only summarily dismisses Reuben's pledge, but it raises once again the question of the loss of their brother Joseph: "His brother [Joseph] is dead and he is the only one left" (v.38).

K. Joseph's Identity (43:1 – 45:28)

1. The Second Trip to Egypt (43:1 – 34)

[1]Now the famine was still severe in the land. [2]So when they had eaten all the grain they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go back and buy us a little more food."

[3]But Judah said to him, "The man warned us solemnly, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.' [4]If you will send our brother along with us, we will go down and buy food for you. [5]But if you will not send him, we will not go down, because the man said to us, 'You will not see my face again unless your brother is with you.'"

[6]Israel asked, "Why did you bring this trouble on me by telling the man you had another brother?"

[7]They replied, "The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family. 'Is your father still living?' he asked us. 'Do you have another brother?' We simply answered his questions. How were we to know he would say, 'Bring your brother down here'?"

[8]Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy along with me and we will go at once, so that we and you and our children may live and not

die. [9]I myself will guarantee his safety; you can hold me personally responsible for him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him here before you, I will bear the blame before you all my life. [10]As it is, if we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice."

[11]Then their father Israel said to them, "If it must be, then do this: Put some of the best products of the land in your bags and take them down to the man as a gift — a little balm and a little honey, some spices and myrrh, some pistachio nuts and almonds. [12]Take double the amount of silver with you, for you must return the silver that was put back into the mouths of your sacks. Perhaps it was a mistake. [13]Take your brother also and go back to the man at once. [14]And may God Almighty grant you mercy before the man so that he will let your other brother and Benjamin come back with you. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved."

[15]So the men took the gifts and double the amount of silver, and Benjamin also. They hurried down to Egypt and presented themselves to Joseph. [16]When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Take these men to my house, slaughter an animal and prepare dinner; they are to eat with me at noon."

[17]The man did as Joseph told him and took the men to Joseph's house. [18]Now the men were frightened when they were taken to his house. They thought, "We were brought here because of the silver that was put back into our sacks the first time. He wants to attack us and overpower us and seize us as slaves and take our donkeys."

[19]So they went up to Joseph's steward and spoke to him at the entrance to the house. [20]"Please, sir," they said, "we came down here the first time to buy food. [21]But at the place where we stopped for the night we opened our sacks and each of us found his silver —the exact weight — in the mouth of his sack. So we have brought it back with us. [22]We have also brought additional silver with us to buy food. We don't know who put our silver in our sacks."

[23]"It's all right," he said. "Don't be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver." Then he brought Simeon out to them.

[24]The steward took the men into Joseph's house, gave them water to wash their feet and provided fodder for their donkeys. [25]They prepared their gifts for Joseph's arrival at noon, because they had heard that they were to

eat there.

[26]When Joseph came home, they presented to him the gifts they had brought into the house, and they bowed down before him to the ground. [27]He asked them how they were, and then he said, “How is your aged father you told me about? Is he still living?”

[28]They replied, “Your servant our father is still alive and well.” And they bowed low to pay him honor.

[29]As he looked about and saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother’s son, he asked, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he said,“God be gracious to you, my son.” [30]Deeply moved at the sight of his brother, Joseph hurried out and looked for a place to weep. He went into his private room and wept there.

[31]After he had washed his face, he came out and, controlling himself, said, “Serve the food.”

[32]They served him by himself, the brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because Egyptians could not eat with Hebrews, for that is detestable to Egyptians. [33]The men had been seated before him in the order of their ages, from the firstborn to the youngest; and they looked at each other in astonishment. [34]When portions were served to them from Joseph’s table, Benjamin’s portion was five times as much as anyone else’s. So they feasted and drank freely with him.

COMMENTARY

1 – 14 In keeping with the general motif of “pairs” of events within the narratives about Joseph, the story begins with the “second” journey of the sons into Egypt. The famine is still in the land, and the grain purchased earlier is gone; so the father sends his sons back to Egypt for more grain (vv.1 – 2).This time it is Judah, not Reuben (42:37), who insists on taking Benjamin back with them in accordance with Joseph’s demands (43:3 – 5).

In persuading his father, Judah gives expression once again to the central themes of “life” and “death” that have been carefully interwoven throughout these narratives (v.8). In a way similar to Reuben (42:37), Judah offers to take full responsibility for Benjamin if he is allowed to accompany the brothers to Egypt: “I myself will guarantee [*ʾeʿerbennû*] his safety” (v.9).

The fact that both Reuben and Judah have suggested ways to ensure Benjamin's safety in Egypt provides another reminder that the events depicted here are an echo of the events of ch. 37, the brothers' mistreatment of Joseph. In that narrative both Reuben and Judah attempted to save Joseph's life in the face of the brothers' evil plan (37:21, 26). Here both Reuben and Judah attempt to save Benjamin from the plan that Joseph has initiated against the brothers. Such reversals and twists of plot are commonplace by now in these narratives, and they serve to show that these events are part of a larger plan, a divine plan (cf. 50:20). As a further reminder to the reader of these "repetitions" within the narrative, Judah is allowed to express his impatience with Jacob by making explicit the fact that this is the "second" time a journey to Egypt has been made: "If we had not delayed, we could have gone and returned twice" (v.10; cf. 41:32).

Jacob, or Israel (as he is known in this chapter), gives in to Judah's plan. Just as in ch. 37 it was Judah's plan that ultimately saved the life of Joseph (37:26), so now it is Judah's plan that saves the life of Simeon. Jacob's farewell words provide the narrative key to what follows: "May God Almighty grant you mercy [*raḥᵉmîm*] before the man" (v.14). In the events that follow, mercy and compassion will come upon them from God.

As happens so often in the patriarchal narratives, the events that follow are guided by just these words. Jacob's words are a script of the following narrative. Thus at the conclusion of the story, when the sons reach Joseph and he sees Benjamin, we see that "his mercy" (*raḥᵉmāyw,* v.30; "*deeply* moved," NIV) is kindled toward his brother. As it turns out, it is Joseph's "mercy" (*raḥᵉmāyw*) that is linked to Jacob's prayer. The fulfillment of Jacob's own words is taken up to define the compassion (*raḥᵉmîm*) Joseph finds toward his brothers. It is a compassion given him by "God Almighty." In these subtle and indirect ways the writer tells us of the power of God in directing the lives of his people and in carrying his plans to completion.

15 – 25 The problem of the brothers' being "spies" (42:9) is not raised again.The readers know, of course, that the brothers are not spies; so the writer drops the issue without further comment.

We are left instead with their apprehensions as they are ushered into the royal house of Joseph. Their fears and misgivings reveal to the reader their conviction that nothing good is going to come of this. The reader, however, is assured at the outset that the brothers are being taken into the house for a great feast (v.16). We know that the brothers' fears in v.18 are misguided.They need not fear becoming Joseph's slaves. It is precisely their misguided fear that the writer wishes to hold before the reader.

To show the underlying cause of the brothers' misgivings and to show just how misguided they are, the writer has them repeat to the steward the account of their finding the money in their grain sacks (vv.19 – 21).The brothers vainly try to explain themselves to anyone who will listen and vainly try to return the money they found in their sacks.

But no one takes their explanation seriously, nor will anyone take their money. The purpose of this is to elicit a response from Joseph's steward: "It's all right. . . .Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks; I received your silver" (v.23). The reader surely knows the steward's words cannot be taken seriously. There has been no mention of silver or money given to the steward. From the narrative alone we understand that the steward has been in on Joseph's plan all along. But, as is often the case in these narratives, unwittingly the steward expresses a central theme of the book: "the God of your father has given you treasure" (v.23).

26 – 34 The writer goes to great lengths in depicting the scene of the banquet. Joseph is conspicuously careful to ask about the well-being of the brothers' father and the lad, Benjamin, whom they have brought back with them (vv.26 – 29).The reader almost has to remind himself that the brothers still do not know that it is Joseph who is entertaining them. It is only when we see Joseph attempt to hide his tears by hurrying to another room (v.30) that we are sure his identity is still unknown.

The question that arises out of this passage is what the brothers themselves are thinking about Joseph's questions and their treatment in his house. They have come expecting to be made into servants, but it is they who are being served (vv.31 – 32). Do they not suspect something? Do they not have questions about Joseph's curiosity about their father and his special treatment of Benjamin? The

writer addresses all such questions by simply stating that the brothers are "dismayed" (*wayyitmᵉhû*, v.33; NIV, "in astonishment"). They ask no questions and seem to accept the words of Joseph's steward ("the God of your father has given you treasure," v.23) and Joseph's words to Benjamin ("God be gracious to you, my son," v.29) as the most plausible solution. For the writer, of course, Joseph's steward has unwittingly given the correct explanation, and Joseph's words have provided a cryptic confirmation.

NOTES

10 פַּעֲמָיִם (*paᶜᵃmāyim*, "twice") continues the theme of 41:32.

26 Joseph's dream - לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לְךָ אָרְצָה (*lᵉhištaḥᵃwôt lᵉkā ʾārᵉṣâ*, "bow down to the ground before you," 37:10) - continues to motivate the course of events in the narrative: וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ־לוֹ אָרְצָה (*wayyištaḥᵃwû-lô ʾārᵉṣâ*, "and they bowed down before him to the ground"; cf. Notes on 42:6).

2. The Silver Cup (44:1 – 34)

[1]Now Joseph gave these instructions to the steward of his house: "Fill the men's sacks with as much food as they can carry, and put each man's silver in the mouth of his sack. [2]Then put my cup, the silver one, in the mouth of the youngest one's sack, along with the silver for his grain." And he did as Joseph said.

[3]As morning dawned, the men were sent on their way with their donkeys. [4]They had not gone far from the city when Joseph said to his steward, "Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say to them, 'Why have you repaid good with evil? [5]Isn't this the cup my master drinks from and also uses for divination? This is a wicked thing you have done.' "

[6]When he caught up with them, he repeated these words to them. [7]But they said to him, "Why does my lord say such things? Far be it from your servants to do anything like that! [8]We even brought back to you from the land of Canaan the silver we found inside the mouths of our sacks. So why would we steal silver or gold from your master's house? [9]If any of your

servants is found to have it, he will die; and the rest of us will become my lord's slaves."

10"Very well, then," he said, "let it be as you say. Whoever is found to have it will become my slave; the rest of you will be free from blame."

11Each of them quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. 12Then the steward proceeded to search, beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. 13At this, they tore their clothes. Then they all loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.

14Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers came in, and they threw themselves to the ground before him. 15Joseph said to them, "What is this you have done? Don't you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?"

16"What can we say to my lord?" Judah replied."What can we say? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servants' guilt. We are now my lord's slaves — we ourselves and the one who was found to have the cup."

17But Joseph said, "Far be it from me to do such a thing! Only the man who was found to have the cup will become my slave. The rest of you, go back to your father in peace."

18Then Judah went up to him and said: "Please, my lord, let your servant speak a word to my lord. Do not be angry with your servant, though you are equal to Pharaoh himself. 19My lord asked his servants, 'Do you have a father or a brother?' 20And we answered, 'We have an aged father, and there is a young son born to him in his old age. His brother is dead, and he is the only one of his mother's sons left, and his father loves him.'

21"Then you said to your servants, 'Bring him down to me so I can see him for myself.' 22And we said to my lord, 'The boy cannot leave his father; if he leaves him, his father will die.' 23But you told your servants, 'Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you will not see my face again.' 24When we went back to your servant my father, we told him what my lord had said.

25"Then our father said, 'Go back and buy a little more food.' 26But we said, 'We cannot go down. Only if our youngest brother is with us will we go. We cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.'

27"Your servant my father said to us, 'You know that my wife bore me

two sons. [28]One of them went away from me, and I said, “He has surely
been torn to pieces.” And I have not seen him since. [29]If you take this one
from me too and harm comes to him, you will bring my gray head down to
the grave in misery.’
[30]“So now, if the boy is not with us when I go back to your servant my
father and if my father, whose life is closely bound up with the boy’s life,
[31]sees that the boy isn’t there, he will die. Your servants will bring the gray
head of our father down to the grave in sorrow.
[32]Your servant guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father. I said, ‘If I do
not bring him back to you, I will bear the blame before you, my father, all
my life!’
[33]“Now then, please let your servant remain here as my lord’s slave in
place of the boy, and let the boy return with his brothers. [34]How can I go
back to my father if the boy is not with me? No! Do not let me see the
misery that would come upon my father.”

COMMENTARY

1 – 13 Once again Joseph tricks his brothers by having his cup, along with Benjamin’s money, returned in Benjamin’s sack of grain. Joseph’s intention is clear from what he instructs his men to say. When they overtake the brothers, they are to say, “Why have you repaid good [ṭôbâ] with evil [rāʿâ]? with evil [*ra*ì<*â*]?” (v.4), and “This is a wicked thing [hāʿrēʿōtem] you have done” (v.5).

If we are to judge by the brothers’ response when they hear the servants’ news of Joseph’s message, the word the servants speak is more detailed than that given in the narrative (vv.4 – 5). We the readers are given an abbreviated version of the conversation. The brothers, for example, immediately refer to the silver and gold that is supposedly in their sacks (v.8), but there was no mention of these things in the servants’ questions. But other than merely to shorten the story, why are Joseph’s words reported in such general terms?

The solution lies in the observation that in their abbreviated form the words spoken by Joseph more precisely express the central question pervading the narratives. These words become, once again, a statement of the contrast between the "bad" (*rāʿâ*) done by the brothers and the "good" (*ṭôbâ*) intended and accomplished by God (cf. 50:20). Joseph's abbreviated words are a guide to the meaning of this narrative.

When stated in such a general way, Joseph's question looks as though it includes the question of the brothers' treatment of him in ch. 37.The question does, in fact, raise again within the narrative the matter of the brothers' guilt in their treatment of Joseph. Whether the brothers realize this or not, the function of Joseph's question as a part of the narrative is to point out to the reader that a residue of guilt still hangs over the brothers. It seems as though everywhere they turn, they hear an echo of their mistreatment of Joseph. The effect of such narrative strategies is to present a picture of a world in which justice ultimately prevails and an "evil" once done does not go unnoticed or unattended.

Joseph's plan works as though every detail was carefully worked out in advance. Not knowing that the cup and money are in Benjamin's sack, the brothers make a rash vow, putting the life of Benjamin and their own freedom in jeopardy (v.9). When the cup is discovered, their response is one of hopelessness (v.13). "They tore their clothing in a rage" (lit. trans. of *wayyiqrᵉʿû śimlōtām*) and return to the city. There is nothing else to do. Their response is a mirror image of their father's response on hearing their earlier report of the presumed death of Joseph (37:34: *wayyiqraʿ yaʿᵃqōb śimlotāyw*, "Then Jacob tore his clothes"). The grief they caused their father has returned on their own heads.

14 – 17 As Joseph's plans turn out as though perfectly orchestrated, we begin to see what his purpose has been. While it may have looked as though he has been working a slow revenge on his brothers, we can see now that his purpose is not revenge but repentance. Through his schemes his brothers are coming to an awareness of their guilt and are now increasingly ready to acknowledge it. Their frustration is expressed in their repetition of the question, "What can we say?" (v.16). Then comes their expression of guilt: "How can we prove our innocence?" The unstated answer behind these questions is an implied negative: "We have nothing to say; we cannot show ourselves to be right. We are guilty."

Thus the conclusion they draw is that “God has uncovered your servants’ guilt.”

Though we can see clearly that the brothers have only the immediate issue of the lost “cup” in mind, within the compass of the whole narrative about Joseph their words take on the scope of a confession of their former guilt. We the readers know that the brothers have not taken the cup; Joseph had it put into Benjamin’s sack. We also know that the brothers know they did not take the cup.

So when they speak of God as “uncovering [their] guilt” (v.16), we are forced to generalize their sense of guilt within the context of the entire narrative. We, along with the author, read their words with a broader significance than they may have intended. We see the narrative interconnections that are not part of their understanding. In his response Joseph steers the matter in a direction that even more closely resembles his brothers’ treatment of him: The young lad is to be sold into slavery in Egypt, and the brothers are to return to their father.

18 – 34 In Judah’s final speech, he retells the story of Joseph. His retelling of the story reveals the brothers’ perception of the events as well as the hopelessness of their situation. The sense of Judah’s version of the present story is that the brothers have been mistreated. The implication is that if anyone is to blame, it is Joseph. According to Judah’s version, it is Joseph who initiated the series of mishaps that has ended in the present predicament. The brothers have followed his instructions and the instructions of their father.

Judah’s words, however, reveal something more to the reader than even he intends. His words show that the fault does not lie with Joseph but with the “evil” intention of the brothers toward Joseph. Once again his words raise the issue of the brothers’ mistreatment of Joseph. At this point Judah says of Joseph, “[He] is dead” (44:20), rather than what was said of Joseph on other occasions, namely, that “[He] is no more” (42:13). The meaning of the expression “he is no more” (*ʾênennû*) within Genesis does not imply that one is dead (cf. 42:36:“Simeon is no more” [*ʾênennû*]; Ge 5:24:“Enoch walked with God; then he was no more [*ʾênennû*], because God took him away”).

We can see, then, that in retelling the story Judah adds a dimension to the brothers’ telling of the events that was not previously there. The effect is that the story now resembles the original intention of the brothers, which was “to kill”

(*lahᵃmîṯô*, 37:18) Joseph; and it corresponds to the story that the brothers gave to Jacob. What in real life would have been written off as a "slip of the tongue" is now, as a part of the narrative, an important clue to the state of mind of the brothers as well as to their guilt.

But Judah's account raises even further the issue of the brothers' guilt regarding Joseph. This can be seen when Judah recounts Jacob's response to the demand that Benjamin be taken to Egypt. On that occasion Jacob said, "You know that my wife bore me two sons. One of them went away from me, and I said, 'He has surely been torn to pieces' " (vv.27 – 28).

Once again, why does Judah recount the story in this way? He surely knows that Jacob's words were mistaken. It was not a wild animal that killed Joseph; it was the brothers themselves who sold him into slavery. But could Judah have told the story any other way? He could not. To tell the story the way it actually happened would be to admit to a guilt even greater than that of which they are presently accused. Thus, even when retelling the story to demonstrate his own innocence, Judah gives testimony, to the reader at least, of his own guilt and the guilt of his brothers.

Though it is through Judah's speech that the reader is again reminded of the brothers' guilt, we should not lose sight of the fact that it is Judah who intervenes in Benjamin's behalf. Ultimately within the narrative, it is his words that save the day. After this speech Joseph can contain himself no longer. He is compelled to unveil his identity to his brothers.

NOTES

3 The real break in the narrative comes here with the 0 + nominal clause — הַבֹּקֶר אוֹר (*habbōqer ʾôr*, "As morning dawned") — and the inverted W + X + QATAL — וְהָאֲנָשִׁים שֻׁלְּחוּ (*wᵉhāʾᵉnāšîm šullᵉḥû*, "the men were sent").

4 רָעָה (*rāʿâ*, "evil, misery") occurs at key moments throughout this segment of narrative (vv.5, 29, 34: הֲרֵעֹתֶם, *hᵉrēʿōtem*, lit., "you were wicked").

14 Though the words are slightly different, וַיִּפְּלוּ לְפָנָיו אָרְצָה (*wayyipplû lᵉpānāyw ʾārᶜṣâ*, "they threw themselves to the ground before him") appears to continue the allusions to Joseph's dreams (37:10).

15 It is important to notice how the narrative protects Joseph from the charge of practicing divination. When he tells his servants to say, וְהוּא נַחֵשׁ יְנַחֵשׁ בּוֹ (*wᵉhûʾ naḥēš yᶜnaḥēš bô*, "and [my master] also uses for divination," v.5), it is all part of a larger scheme to mislead his brothers and thus cannot be taken at face value; and when he says to his brothers, יְנַחֵשׁ אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כָּמֹנִי (*yᶜnaḥēš ʾîš ᵃšer kāmōnî*, "a man like me can find things out by divination"), he cautiously avoids saying that he ever uses the cup. All he says is "a man like me" uses the cup for divination. This is not surprising in light of the fact that such a practice —מְנַחֵשׁ (*mᶜnaḥēš*, "interprets omens") — is strictly forbidden in Deuteronomy 18:10. While such subtlety in meaning may appear forced to the modern reader, they are not beyond the bounds of the ancient author's careful attention to detail (cf. the naming of God in Ge 16:13).

3. Joseph's Revelation (45:1 – 28)

[1]Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all his attendants, and he cried out, "Have everyone leave my presence!" So there was no one with Joseph when he made himself known to his brothers. [2]And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and Pharaoh's household heard about it.

[3]Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

[4]Then Joseph said to his brothers,"Come close to me." When they had done so, he said, "I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! [5]And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. [6]For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. [7]But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

[8]"So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father

to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. [9]Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. [10]You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me — you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. [11]I will provide for you there, because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’

[12]“You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that it is really I who am speaking to you. [13]Tell my father about all the honor accorded me in Egypt and about everything you have seen. And bring my father down here quickly.”

[14]Then he threw his arms around his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin embraced him, weeping. [15]And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.

[16]When the news reached Pharaoh’s palace that Joseph’s brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased. [17]Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Tell your brothers, ‘Do this: Load your animals and return to the land of Canaan, [18]and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.’

[19]“You are also directed to tell them, ‘Do this: Take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. [20]Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.’ ”

[21]So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey. [22]To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes. [23]And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey.

[24]Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, “Don’t quarrel on the way!”

[25]So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. [26]They told him, “Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.” Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. [27]But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. [28]And

Israel said, “I’m convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

COMMENTARY

1 – 8 The narrative is clear that Joseph has taken no personal enjoyment in the deception of his brothers. When he can hold back no longer, he reveals his true identity (v.1). We are not told why Joseph chooses not to reveal his identity to his brothers immediately, but we can see from the narrative itself that the effect of his scheme is to further the central themes of the book. In his words of explanation and comfort to his brothers, Joseph returns once again to the central theme of the narrative: though the brothers were responsible for Joseph’s being sold into Egypt, and though they intended “harm,” God is ultimately behind it all and has worked it out for the “good” (cf. 50:20). As he tells his brothers, “It was to save lives [*lᵉmiḥᵉyâ*] that God sent me ahead of you” (v.5), and, “God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save [*ûlᵉhaḥᵃyôt*] your lives” (v.7).

In the narrative thus far, this theme has been expressed by Jacob (42:2) and Judah (43:8), and it has been indirectly alluded to by Joseph (42:18). Here, however, and in 50:20, the theme receives full expression in the words of Joseph. Those words pull back the narrative veil and allow the reader to see what has been going on behind the scenes all along. It was not the brothers who sent Joseph to Egypt; it was God — and God had a purpose for it all. We have seen numerous clues within the narrative that this has been the case; but now the central character, the one ultimately responsible for initiating the plots and subplots of the preceding narratives, reveals the divine plan behind it all. Joseph, who could discern the divine plan in the dreams of Pharaoh, also knows the divine plan in the affairs of his brothers. God’s plan is accomplishing a “great deliverance” (v.7).

In describing God’s care over him, Joseph makes an allusion to the brothers’ initial question regarding his dreams as a young lad. They had said, “Do you intend to reign over us?” (37:8). He reminds them that he has now been made “ruler of all Egypt” (45:8).

9 – 20 In the second part of his words spoken to the brothers, Joseph makes plans to bring his father to Egypt. He twice repeats that the brothers are to go to Jacob and with all haste bring him down to Egypt (vv.9, 13). He has set aside the "region of Goshen" (v.10) as the place where they can continue to raise their families and livestock during the five remaining years of famine. In the midst of the famine, the sons of Israel will be well provided for in Goshen.

It can hardly be without purpose that this picture of God's chosen people dwelling safely and prosperously in the land Joseph provided for them comes at the close of Genesis and that it is a near replica of the way things were in the beginning. The writer appears intentionally to draw our attention to the connection between the end of the book and the beginning. Thus when Pharaoh restates Joseph's offer and "twice" gives the brothers the "good" (*ṭûb*, vv.18, 20; NIV,"best") of the land of Egypt, it is hard not to see in this narrative a conscious allusion to the "good" (*ṭôb*, land given to Adam in ch. 1. The picture of Joseph is a picture of restoration —not just the restoration of the good fortune of Jacob but, as a picture, the restoration of the blessing to all humanity promised through the "seed" of Jacob.

21 – 28 Jacob's response to Joseph's words plays a key role in connecting these narratives to the message of the Pentateuch as a whole. Throughout the Pentateuch there is a focus on the response of God's people to the work of God. At important moments in the narrative, this response is interpreted as either one of "faith" (*he'mîn*, 15:6; Ex 4:31; 14:31; 19:9) or "no faith" (*lō'-he'mîn*, 45:26; cf. Nu 14:11; 20:12).

Jacob's response falls closely in line with these other examples. Here, however, the writer gives a deeper insight into the nature of his faith. When at first Jacob hears the news that Joseph is alive, "his heart grew numb" (*wayyāpog libbô*, v.26; NIV, "Jacob was stunned") and "he did not believe" (*lō'-he'mîn*). But when he hears Joseph's words and sees all that he has sent to take him back to Egypt, "the spirit . . . of Jacob revived" (v.27), and he sets out to go to him (v.28).

In this narrative the faith of Jacob bears the same marks as the other occurrences of faith in the Pentateuch, but in this text alone a different dimension is stressed — the contrast between his "numbed heart" and his "revived spirit." Jacob's lack of faith is identified with his "numbed heart."

When his spirit is renewed, he believes (faith). This viewpoint is similar to that of the later prophetic literature in which faith and a “new heart” are synonymous (cf. Jer 31:33 – 34; Eze 36:26) and in which lack of faith (*lō᾽ ta²mînû*, Hab 1:5; NIV, “not believe”) is synonymous with “numbness” (*tāpûg tôrâ*, Hab 1:4; NIV, “the law is paralyzed”). The message of these texts is summarized in the words of David in Psalm 51:10: “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

NOTES

1 וְלֹא־יָכֹל יוֹסֵף לְהִתְאַפֵּק (*wᵉlō᾽-yākōl yôsēp lᵉhiṯᵓappēq*, “Then Joseph could no longer control himself ”; W + X + QATAL) marks a transition to a new segment of narrative.

4 – 5 The מְכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי … הֵנָּה (*mᵉkartem ᵓōṯî … hēnnâ*,' “the one you sold . . . here”) gives a helpful perspective on the events of ch. 37. In Joseph’s version, it was his brothers who sold him to Egypt. His words thus resolve an important ambiguity in 37:28. As it stands in the narrative of ch. 37, the subject of the verbs וַיִּמְשְׁכוּ (*wayyimšᵉkû*, “[they] pulled . . . up”), וַיַּעֲלוּ (*wayyaᶜᵉlû*, lit., “and they lifted up” [untrans. in NIV]), and וַיִּמְכְּרוּ (*wayyimkᵉrû*, “and sold him”) are the אֲנָשִׁים מִדְיָנִים (*ᵉnāšîm midyānîm*, lit., “men of Midian”), who are the grammatical subject of the immediately preceding verb וַיַּעַבְרוּ (*wayyaᶜabrû*,'“[they] came by”). Thus 37:28 can be translated, “The Midianite men passed by and drew Joseph up out of the pit and sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites” (lit. trans.). The way Joseph reads it, however, the subject of these verbs is אֶחָיו (*ᵓeḥāyw*, “his brothers”), who are the understood subject of the third masculine plural verbs throughout the narrative (cf. *ᵓeḥ.aìyw* in 37:23, 26 – 27). Such a reading suits Judah’s statement to his brothers לְכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֶנּוּ (*lᵉkû wᵉnimkᵉrennû*, “Come, let’s sell him”) — in v.27.

16 – 23 The recurring theme of “the good” is marked throughout this segment by the repetition of forms of the root טוֹב (*ṭôb*; cf. וַיִּיטַב, *wayyîṭab*,'“pleased,” v.16; טוּב, *ṭûb*, “best,” vv.18, 20, 23).

L. Jacob’s Journey to Egypt (46:1 – 7)

[1]So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

[2]And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said,“Jacob! Jacob!”

“Here I am,” he replied.

[3]“I am God, the God of your father,” he said. “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. [4]I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph’s own hand will close your eyes.”

[5]Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel’s sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. [6]They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. [7]He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters — all his offspring.

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 Before Jacob goes to Egypt, he travels to Beersheba, where he builds an altar and offers sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac (v.1). The writer reminds the reader in this way that the patriarchs worship the same God. Jacob worships the God of Isaac.

There is an interesting contrast between God’s words to Jacob here and his words to Isaac in ch. 26.The Lord had said to Isaac, “Do not go down to Egypt” (26:2); but he now says to Jacob, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt” (v.3). Such a change in attitude toward the patriarchs’ traveling to Egypt indicates that the Lord is following a specific plan with regard to the chosen people. Viewed alone, God’s instructions to Isaac in ch. 26 may leave the impression that he was opposed in principle to a sojourn in Egypt. This in turn might leave the impression that the whole story of Joseph, which results in Jacob’s going to Egypt, runs counter to God’s purposes. When the Lord speaks to Jacob, however, it becomes clear that a sojourn in Egypt can play a key role in God’s plan. Such a perspective is also consistent with a central theme of the narrative: God is working all things for the good of Jacob and his sons (50:20).

God’s words to Jacob “in a vision at night” reiterate the promise to Abraham

that from his descendants will come a “great nation” (*lᵉgôy gādôl*, v.3; cf. 12:2). They also add that Egypt is to be the place where the house of Jacob will become the nation of Israel. These words, then, anticipate God’s great work that is yet to be told in the Pentateuch. God will bring his people into Egypt and be with them there, where they will become a great nation; then God will bring them back to the Promised Land through the exodus. This is the second “vision” in which God’s future plans with Abraham’s offspring are revealed. In ch. 15,“in a vision” (v.1) God reveals to Abraham that his descendants will be taken into servitude for four hundred years (15:13) and after that will come out with “great wealth” (15:14; NIV, “possessions”).

5 – 7 Special attention is given to the journey into Egypt of Jacob and his family. Just as Abraham left Ur of the Chaldeans and journeyed to Canaan (12:4 – 5), so now Jacob leaves the land of Canaan and journeys to Egypt (vv.5 – 6). Both men are traveling in obedience to God’s will, and their obedience plays a pivotal role in God’s election of the family of Abraham. Thus vv.6 – 7 emphasize (by repetition) that “all his offspring” (*wᵉkol zaʿᵃô*, vv.6 – 7; lit., “all his seed”) travels with Jacob to the land of Egypt. To demonstrate graphically the importance of this point, the writer lists the names of “all his offspring” and numbers them at “seventy” (v.27).

NOTE

3 “I will make you into a great nation” alludes back to “a community of nations will come from you” (35:11).

M. Jacob’s Sons in Egypt (46:8 – 27)

8 These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt:
Reuben the firstborn of Jacob.
9 The sons of Reuben:
Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron and Carmi.
10 The sons of Simeon:
Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite

woman.
11 The sons of Levi:
Gershon, Kohath and Merari.
12The sons of Judah:
Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan).
The sons of Perez:
Hezron and Hamul.
13 The sons of Issachar:
Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron.
14 The sons of Zebulun:
Sered, Elon and Jahleel.
15These were the sons Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, besides his daughter Dinah.
These sons and daughters of his were thirty-three in all.
16 The sons of Gad:
Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi and Areli.
17 The sons of Asher:
Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah.
Their sister was Serah.
The sons of Beriah:
Heber and Malkiel.
18These were the children born to Jacob by Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah — sixteen in all.
19 The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel:
Joseph and Benjamin. 20In Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On.
21 The sons of Benjamin:
Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim and Ard.
22These were the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob — fourteen in all.
23 The son of Dan:
Hushim.
24 The sons of Naphtali:
Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem.
25These were the sons born to Jacob by Bilhah, whom Laban had given

to his daughter Rachel — seven in all.

[26]All those who went to Egypt with Jacob — those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives — numbered sixty-six persons. [27]With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all.

COMMENTARY

8 – 27 The list of names in these verses appears to have been selected so that the total numbers "seventy" (*šib'îm*, v.27). It can hardly be coincidental that the number of nations in Genesis 10 is also "seventy." Just as the "seventy nations" represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the "seventy sons" represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the sons of Israel. What we see here in narrative form demonstrates the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God "set up boundaries for the people [Ge 10] according to the number of the sons of Israel." Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that comes through Abraham and his offspring is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing that was lost in the fall.

The picture of God that emerges from these pages is not merely of a God who works with his own chosen people for their good alone, but who works with the nations to bring about the plan of salvation and blessing to all. The picture is similar to that in Isaiah 45, where the rise of the kingdom of Persia is portrayed as the handiwork of God, all for the sake of the universal salvation and blessing God intends through his chosen "seed" (cf. Ge 22:18).

NOTE

8 – 27 The narrative explicitly states that the total number of the sons of Israel was "seventy" (שִׁבְעִים, *šib'îm*, v.27); however, within the passage itself that number must be derived in one of two ways. First, there is a general list of the family of Jacob with subtotals: "thirty-three" (v.15), "sixteen" (v.18),"fourteen" (v.22), and "seven" (v.25), which total seventy. This list includes Jacob himself (notice the addition of "Jacob and his descendants" to "These are the names of the

Israelites," v.8) and includes Joseph (v.19) and his two sons born in Egypt (v.20), but not Er and Onan (v.12), who died in Canaan before the journey to Egypt. The subtotals in the list also include Dinah (v.15).The difficulty with this way of reading the list is the addition of "sons and daughters of his" (בָּנָיו וּבְנֹתָיו, *bānāyw ûḇnôtāyw*), which appears to exclude Jacob, but v.8 appears to deal sufficiently with that question.

Second, a further subtotal is given in vv.26 – 27: all those of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt numbered sixty-six (v.26). Since that number is said to include only "those who were [Jacob's] direct descendants" (v.26) and to exclude "[Jacob's] sons' wives" (נְשֵׁי בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב, *nᵉšê bᵉnê-yaʿᵃqōḇ*) Jacob, Dinah, and Serah are also not in the number. Jacob, 832 – 33, has suggested that Shaul, the son of a Canaanite (v.10), is also to be excluded, which gives sixty-six. Keil, 369 – 70, suggests that Joseph is not included in the sixty-six, but v.27 gives no grounds for that assumption. It appears certain that only Joseph's two sons are to be added to the subtotal of sixty-six. When Dinah and Serah and Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are added, the total is seventy. The final number of seventy is consistent with Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22, both of which list seventy (*šiḇʿîm*) as the number of the sons of Israel who went down into Egypt.

The LXX lists five more names at the end of v.20 — names derived from Numbers 26:29 – 36. Since the LXX also gives the number as seventy-five in Exodus 1:5, the extra names appear to be intentional. Recently, early Hebrew copies of Exodus 1:5 have been found that also contain the number seventy-five (חמש ושבעים, *ḥmš wšḇʿym*. This was apparently the tradition followed by Stephen in Acts 309 7:14b. On textual grounds alone the LXX represents the better text in that the MT appears to be a harmonization to Deuteronomy 10:22. However, the compositional interest of the Pentateuch in the number seventy weighs considerably in favor of the MT.

It is not without importance that Hebrew texts from Qumran and the LXX read "the number of the sons of God" in Deuteronomy 32:8, where there is a thematic statement of the significance of the correspondence in number between the seventy nations in Genesis 10 and the "members of Jacob's family." But in Genesis 10 the tradition that lies behind the LXX may have included the four kingdoms of Nimrod (10:10) and the Philistines (10:14), thus making the total of the table of nations seventy-five.

N. Settling in Goshen (46:28 – 47:12)

28 Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to
Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, 29 Joseph had his
chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as
Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept
for a long time.

30 Israel said to Joseph, “Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for
myself that you are still alive.”

31 Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father’s household, “I will
go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, ‘My brothers and my
father’s household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to
me. 32 The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought
along their flocks and herds and everything they own.’ 33 When Pharaoh
calls you in and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ 34 you should answer,
‘Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our
fathers did.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for
all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.”

47:1 Joseph went and told Pharaoh, “My father and brothers, with their
flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of
Canaan and are now in Goshen.” 2 He chose five of his brothers and
presented them before Pharaoh.

3 Pharaoh asked the brothers,“What is your occupation?”

“Your servants are shepherds,” they replied to Pharaoh, “just as our
fathers were.” 4 They also said to him, “We have come to live here awhile,
because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants’ fl ocks have no
pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen.”

5 Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to
you, 6 and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your
brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you
know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my
own livestock.”

7 Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before
Pharaoh. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, 8 Pharaoh asked him, “How old are
you?”

9 And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred
and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the

years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." [10]Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from his presence.

[11]So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed. [12]Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children.

COMMENTARY

46:28 – 34 Here Judah, not Joseph, leads the sons of Israel into the land of Goshen. Once again the writer seems to have singled out Judah for special consideration rather than Joseph. Though in the story of Joseph as a whole Joseph is responsible for the preservation of the sons of Jacob in Egypt, here, within the details of the passage, it is Judah who "pointed out the way" (*lhôrōt*; NIV, "to get directions," v.28) to the land of Goshen. This focus on Judah is part of the writer's overall strategy to highlight the role of Judah in God's plan to bring about Israel's deliverance. In Genesis this prominence of Judah is seen most clearly in Jacob's words of blessing to his twelve sons (see 49:8 – 12).

The chapter ends with Joseph's plan to secure the land of Goshen as a dwelling place for the sons of Israel (vv.31 – 34).The plan is simply to tell Pharaoh that they are shepherds. According to the writer's explanation, the Egyptians despised shepherds and would thus allow the Israelites to dwell by themselves in Goshen. In ch. 47 Joseph's plan succeeds, and the Israelites are given the land of Goshen. In these two narratives Joseph and Judah are placed in marked contrast. Judah leads the brothers to the land of Goshen, but Joseph initiates a wise plan that results in their being able to live there.

47:1 – 12 We have frequently noted that throughout the narratives about Joseph the writer is careful to recount key events twice. The events of chs. 46 and 47 are no exception. Joseph tells his plan to his brothers in ch. 46 and now, in ch. 47, the writer recounts the outcome of the plan. Joseph's plan is successful and thereby reinforces a central theme of the narrative: "The LORD was with Joseph and he prospered" (39:2).

Joseph's wisdom results in the sons of Israel dwelling safely in the land of

Goshen while there is severe famine in Canaan (vv.1 – 4). Pharaoh's response (vv.5 – 6) is even more generous than the previous narrative suggests. Not only does he grant their wish by allowing Joseph's brothers to settle in Goshen, he also puts the brothers in charge of his own livestock — a result curiously reminiscent of Joseph's rise to power in the house of Pharaoh (cf. 41:41). Thus the narrative shows that Joseph's fortune is duplicated in the fortunes of his brothers. The land of Goshen is called the "best part of the land" (*mêṭab*, v.6), which perhaps is an echo of the "good" (*tôb*) land established in creation (1:31), the ultimate "good" (*tôb*) that God intended in all of these events (50:20).

The central focus of the narrative is to show that Jacob "blesses" (*wayʿbārek*, vv.7, 10) Pharaoh when Jacob is brought before him. Its importance is apparent from the fact that it is mentioned twice. Behind this emphasis is God's promise to Abraham that he would bless those who blessed Abraham's seed. In Joseph and in Jacob this promise to Abraham is being fulfilled with the nations. Jacob's poem about "the last days" in ch. 49 will focus that blessing further in the royal "seed" of Abraham from the tribe of Judah (49:8 – 12).

The words of Jacob to Pharaoh in v.9 —"My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers"— sound unusual in the way they contrast with the two accounts of his blessing of Pharaoh. What is their significance? They appear to be a deliberate contrast to the later promise in Deuteronomy to the one who honors his father and mother, namely, that he will "live long" and that it will "go well with [him] in the land" (Dt 5:16). Jacob, who deceived his father and thereby gained the blessing, must not only die outside his own land, but also leads a relatively short life comprised of difficult years.

From his own words, we see a final recompense for Jacob's earlier actions. Abraham obeyed God and lived long in the land (26:5), but Jacob's years are short and difficult. In spite of this final verdict on his life, the narrative goes on to show that he lives out his remaining years "in the good [*bʿmêṭab*; NIV, 'best part'] of the land" (v.11); and Joseph, his son, provides for him and his household.

NOTES

47:6 A central theme —הָאָרֶץ הַטּוֹבָה (*hāʾāreṣ haṭṭôbâ*, "the good land") — i s woven into the narrative by the repetition of בְּמֵיטַב הָאָרֶץ (*bᵉmēṭab hāʾāreṣ*,' "the best part of the land," vv.6, 11).

7 וַיְבָרֶךְ יַעֲקֹב (*wayᵉbārek yaʿᵃqōb*, "Jacob blessed") takes up the theme of 12:3 — "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"— and is echoed later in Exodus 12:32, where Pharaoh says, "And also bless me" (וּבֵרַכְתֶּם גַּם־אֹתִי, *ûbēraktem gam-ʾōtî*). The fact that this phrase is stated twice in vv.7 and 10 shows that it plays an important role in the narrative (see notes and commentary on 41:32).

O. Joseph's Rule in Egypt (47:13 – 27)

13There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine
was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine.
14Joseph collected all the money that was to be found in Egypt and Canaan
in payment for the grain they were buying, and he brought it to Pharaoh's
palace. 15When the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all
Egypt came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before
your eyes? Our money is used up."

16"Then bring your livestock," said Joseph. "I will sell you food in
exchange for your livestock, since your money is gone." 17So they brought
their livestock to Joseph, and he gave them food in exchange for their
horses, their sheep and goats, their cattle and donkeys. And he brought
them through that year with food in exchange for all their livestock.

18When that year was over, they came to him the following year and said,
"We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our
livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies
and our land. 19Why should we perish before your eyes — we and our land
as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we with our land
will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not
die, and that the land may not become desolate."

20So Joseph bought all the land in Egypt for Pharaoh. The Egyptians, one
and all, sold their fields, because the famine was too severe for them. The
land became Pharaoh's, 21and Joseph reduced the people to servitude, from
one end of Egypt to the other. 22However, he did not buy the land of the
priests, because they received a regular allotment from Pharaoh and had

food enough from the allotment Pharaoh gave them. That is why they did not sell their land.

[23]Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have bought you and your land today for Pharaoh, here is seed for you so you can plant the ground. [24]But when the crop comes in, give a fifth of it to Pharaoh. The other four-fifths you may keep as seed for the fields and as food for yourselves and your households and your children.”

[25]“You have saved our lives,” they said. “May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh.”

[26]So Joseph established it as a law concerning land in Egypt — still in force today — that a fifth of the produce belongs to Pharaoh. It was only the land of the priests that did not become Pharaoh’s.

[27]Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.

COMMENTARY

13 – 27 The writer goes into considerable detail to show the final steps by which Joseph extends his authority and the authority of Pharaoh over Egypt. The narrative returns to the story line of 41:57 with Joseph in Egypt and his work on behalf of Pharaoh; the brothers are no longer the center of attention. The writer, at least temporarily, focuses only on Joseph and his sons. The narrative returns to the brothers in ch. 49, but there the story is told not from the perspective of Joseph and his brothers but of Jacob and his sons, with Joseph as only one of the brothers. Only in the end, at 50:15, do we return to the theme of Joseph and his brothers.

We might well ask what is the strategy of the writer in inserting the account of Joseph and his brothers (chs. 42 – 46) into the middle of those narratives dealing with Joseph’s rise to power in Egypt (chs. 39 – 41; 47). The answer lies in the way this final narrative mirrors the story of Joseph and his brothers. Throughout those narratives the theme is repeatedly expressed that Joseph’s wisdom and administrative skills save the life of his brothers and father. Thus at the beginning of the story, Jacob tells his sons to go down to Egypt to buy grain “that we may live and not die” (*wᵉnihyeh wᵉlō᾽ nāmût*, 42:2). Then Judah, “in the second year” (*šᵉnātayim*, 45:6), tells his father to let them return to Egypt “that we may live

and not die" (*wᵉnihyeh wᵉlōʾ nāmût*, 43:8). Finally, when Joseph reveals his identity, he tells his brothers that God has sent him to Egypt "to save life" (*lᵉmilṭ̠yâ*, 45:5; NIV, "to save lives").

In keeping with that emphasis the present narrative opens with the Egyptians' statement to Joseph as they seek to buy grain from him: "Why should we die before your eyes?" (*wᵉlāmmâ nāmût negdekā*, v.15). It continues with the account of their return to Joseph "the second year" (v.18; NIV, "the following year"), when they again say, "Why should we perish?" (*lāmmâ nāmût*, v.19), and then again, "that we may live and not die" (*wᵉnihyeh wᵉlōʾ nāmût*, v.19). Such repetitions suggest a larger thematic strategy is at work. First with his brothers and then with the Egyptians, Joseph's wisdom is acknowledged as the source of life for everyone in the land.

A further evidence of a distinct strategy here can be seen in the ironic twist given the earlier narratives by the outcome of this chapter. The story of Joseph and his brothers began with Joseph's being sold (*wayyimkᵉrû*, 37:28) into slavery (*ʿebed*, 39:17) for twenty pieces of silver (*kasep*, 37:28). Now at the conclusion, Joseph is shown selling (*mākᵉrû*, v.20) the whole of the land of Egypt into slavery (*ʿabādîm*, vv.19, 25) and taking the nation's "money" (*hākkesep*, lit., "silver," v.18). In the end, because of Joseph's wisdom the offspring of Abraham becomes "fruitful" (*wayyiprû*, v.27), "increases [*wayyirbû*] greatly in number," and live safely and prosperously in the "region" (*ʾereṣ*) of Goshen. This picture is an obvious replication of the blessing of the early chapters of Genesis: "Be fruitful [*pᵉrû*] and increase in number [*ûrᵉbû*]; fill the earth [*hāʾāreṣ*]" (1:28).

P. Jacob's Deathbed (47:28 – 49:33)

1. Jacob's Burial Instructions (47:28 – 31)

> [28]Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, and the years of his life were a hundred and forty-seven. [29]When the time drew near for Israel to die, he called for his son Joseph and said to him,"If I have found favor in your eyes, put your hand under my thigh and promise that you will show me kindness and faithfulness. Do not bury me in Egypt, [30]but when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me where they are buried."

"I will do as you say," he said.
31"Swear to me," he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff.

COMMENTARY

28 The thread of narrative continues from 47:8 – 12, where Jacob's age was given as 130 years. To return to the subject of Jacob, the writer bridges the narrative gap with a summation of all the years of his life; 17 years in Egypt plus the 130 give a total of 147 years.

The initial impression from v.28 is that the narratives about Jacob are coming to a close, but such is not the case; two crucial chapters remain. The function of this verse is twofold. First, it provides continuity within the narrative about Jacob that was broken by the account of Joseph's further rise to power (vv.13 – 27); second, it moves the narratives to a new time frame, seventeen years later. The underlying assumption is that the famine is over and Joseph's position in Egypt has been securely established. The writer can now move on to the last days of Jacob.

29 – 31 As he approaches death, Jacob's only request is that he not be buried in Egypt. The manner of his request suggests parallels to the sending of Abraham's servant to find a bride for Isaac: "Put your hand under my thigh and promise" (v.29; cf. 24:2). As Abraham approached death (24:1), he did not want his son to take a wife from among the people in the land where he was then dwelling but rather to take a wife from among his own family (24:3 – 4). In the same way, as Jacob approaches death (v.29) he does not want to be buried among the Egyptians but among his fathers (v.30) in his own land. The same theme is taken up in ch. 50, when Joseph makes his sons swear that they will carry his bones back to his homeland — a request carried out by the sons of Israel in Joshua 24:32.

A central element of the promise to Abraham was the promise of his own land. The request of the patriarchs to be buried in the land "with their fathers" brings to the fore their trust in God's faithfulness. Henceforth an important symbol of one's faith in God's promises is the burial of the faithful offspring in

the land of promise. In Ezekiel 37, the prophecy of the "dry bones," the hope embedded in this symbol is given full expression: "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you into the land of Israel . . . and you will live" (Eze 37:12 – 14).

In Ezekiel 37, the prophet returns to one of the central themes of the narratives about Joseph: the rivalry between Joseph and Judah. As early as the rivalry between Judah's mother, Leah, and Joseph's mother, Rachel (ch. 30), the question of the preeminence of one of the brothers over the other has occupied a central role in Genesis. In chs. 48 (the blessing of Joseph) and 49 (the blessing of Judah) the issue comes to a final resolution in the choice of one from the tribe of Judah who will reign over the rest of the brothers (49:8 – 10). So also in Ezekiel 37, the prophet returns to the theme of the narratives about Joseph and the rivalry between the brothers. There, as in Genesis, the brothers are reunited under the king from the tribe of Judah:

> Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, "Belonging to Judah. . .." Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, "Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph. . .." Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.
>
> . .. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms.. . .
>
> My servant David will be king over them. . . . They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob. (Eze 37:16 – 17, 22 – 25)

Thus the narratives of Genesis have much the same issues and concerns as the prophecies of Ezekiel. The chief concern is for the fulfillment of God's promises to Jacob. Those whose faith is like Jacob's are those who look for the time when the "dry bones" will again be given life at the establishment of the reign of the king from the tribe of Judah.

2. Ephraim and Manasseh Blessed (48:1 – 22)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 48 forms the conclusion to the narratives about Joseph. The phrase "some time later" (v.1) suggests a break in the narrative and separates this

passage from the preceding events. As in the earlier patriarchal narratives, the blessing of the father is passed along to the next generation.

Two features of this passage stand out. First, as in the earlier instances of the patriarchal blessings, the younger son, Ephraim, is blessed as the firstborn rather than the older, Manasseh (v.19). In this respect the passage continues the familiar theme that the blessing does not follow the lines of natural descent or natural right. The blessing is a gift bestowed on those who cannot claim it as a right. Second, the blessing recorded in this chapter is largely subordinated and superseded by the blessing of Jacob, which follows in ch. 49.

A curious feature of the entire narrative about Joseph is that Judah, rather than Joseph, ultimately prevails in gaining the position of preeminence among his brothers. As important as Joseph is to Genesis, his role is subordinate to that of Judah. Consequently, the blessings of Joseph's sons recorded in this passage do not play an important role in the later biblical story. Rather, it is the blessing of Judah in ch. 49 that plays the central role in the ongoing story of the promise and the blessing. From Judah comes the house of David, and from David comes the Messiah — this is the focus of the biblical story. The two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, play an important role in the texts dealing with the divided northern kingdom; but the biblical writer's attention to that kingdom pales in the light of the rising star of David.

[1]Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two
sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. [2]When Jacob was told, "Your
son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the
bed.

[3]Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land
of Canaan, and there he blessed me [4]and said to me, 'I am going to make
you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community
of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your
descendants after you.'

[5]"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you
here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as
Reuben and Simeon are mine. [6] Any children born to you after them will be
yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of
their brothers. [7]As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died

in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath” (that is, Bethlehem).

8When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, “Who are these?”

9“They are the sons God has given me here,” Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, “Bring them to me so I may bless them.”

10Now Israel’s eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.

11Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.”

12Then Joseph removed them from Israel’s knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. 13And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel’s left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them close to him. 14But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh’s head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.

15Then he blessed Joseph and said,

“May the God before whom my fathers
Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd
all my life to this day,
16the Angel who has delivered me from all harm
— may he bless these boys.
May they be called by my name
and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
and may they increase greatly
upon the earth.”

17When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18Joseph said to him,“No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”

19But his father refused and said,“I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.” 20He blessed them that day and said,

"In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing:
'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"
So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.
21Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. 22And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 As in 47:28 – 31, we are again reminded of Jacob's frailty (v.1), and we can see that his life is drawing to a close. But as soon as he sees Joseph and his two sons, Jacob is revived (v.2), and he prepares to bestow God's blessing on the house of Joseph. Jacob's recollection of God's promise to him at Bethel (35:9 – 13) is significant. He repeats the Lord's words almost verbatim; but as is frequently the case, in the minor alterations we can see not only Jacob's assessment of the promise but also the writer's own perspective on that promised blessing.

In 35:11 the Lord had said, "Be fruitful [*pᵉrēh*, imperative] and increase [*ûrᵉbēh*, imperative] in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from your body." The use of the imperative in blessings is not unusual and should be understood not as a command but as a form of "well-wishing." The Lord is saying,"May you be fruitful and increase" (cf. 1:28). But as Jacob retells the story to Joseph here, he does not use the imperative. He changes the verbal forms to stress God's part as the one who brings about all that had been promised: "I am going to make you fruitful [*hinnî mapᵉkā*] and will increase your numbers [*wᵉhirbîtikā*]. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you" (v.4).

As Jacob reflects on the blessing, he brings out just that aspect of the blessing that had been the theme of the narratives about Joseph: ultimately, God will bring about all that he has promised. All that has happened to the house of Jacob has been in God's plan and was intended by him "for good" (cf. 50:20).

It may also be significant that Jacob omits one of the key elements of the

promise of ch. 35. The Lord had said, “Kings will come from your body” (35:11; cf. 17:6, 16), but in the present chapter no mention is made of that part of the promise. Why? Likely the stress on the role of Judah with regard to the kingship in ch. 49 has precluded any mention of the promise of kings in reference to Joseph.

5 – 7 The two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, are taken into the family of Jacob and are to be treated as his own (v.5).They and the other sons of Jacob will inherit the promise to Abraham (v.6). Henceforth the families of Ephraim and Manasseh are counted among the sons of Jacob and later become the two of the most important tribes of Israel. In later biblical texts these two names became synonymous with the northern kingdom of Israel, which stood in bitter opposition to the kingdom of Judah.

Verse 7 has long puzzled biblical interpreters. Why mention Rachel at this point in the narrative, and why mention her burial site? If we relate the verse to what precedes, the mention of Rachel might be prompted by the fact that just as she had borne Jacob “two sons” (44:27, Joseph and Benjamin) at a time when he was about to enter (48:7) the land, so also Joseph had given Jacob “two sons” (v.5) just when he was about to enter Egypt. Such thematic symmetry suggests that Ephraim and Manasseh are seen as replacements for Joseph and Benjamin, which serves to further the sense of divine providence behind the events of Jacob’s life.

Furthermore, Jacob’s recollection (v.7) replicates virtually verbatim the account of Rachel’s death in 35:16 – 19. In both passages stress is laid on the site of “Ephrath,” which the writer identifies in both passages as Bethlehem. Rachel’s burial place, like that of Abraham and Sarah and Jacob’s own impending burial site (47:29 – 30), serves as a reminder of the faithfulness of God to the covenantal promise.

8 – 14 The blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh is recounted in great detail. In the next chapter, when Jacob blesses his sons, these two sons are not mentioned. The function of the present account is to augment the blessings of ch. 49 with an account of the blessing of the two sons who have taken their place in the house of Jacob along with the other sons (vv.5 – 6). Great care is taken to emphasize that in the blessing of these two sons, Ephraim, the younger brother, is given the

blessing of the firstborn, Manasseh (v.20b). As has been the case throughout the patriarchal narratives, the younger son is chosen to carry the line of blessing.

The first blessing (vv.15 – 16) appears to be of Joseph rather than the two sons (*wayᶜbārek ʾet-yôsēp*, "Then he blessed Joseph," v.15). In the blessing itself, however, reference is made to the "young sons" (v.16), and the blessing of Joseph ultimately focuses on them. But before Jacob continues to address the two sons specifically in the blessing, Joseph interrupts him and wants his father to place his right hand on Manasseh rather than Ephraim (cf. v.13), thus giving the right of the firstborn to Manasseh, the eldest son. After objecting to Joseph's attempt (v.19), Jacob blesses the two sons specifically (*wayᶜbāᵃkēm*, "He blessed them," v.20) and gives Ephraim preeminence over Manasseh.

15 – 16 Jacob's blessing is a storehouse of thematic terms that direct the reader's attention to several major themes in the book. God is identified as "the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked [*hithallᵉkû*]" (v.15). Not only does the mention of Abraham and Isaac connect Jacob's faith in God to his immediate forefathers, but it also helps tie together the faith of the earliest patriarchs in Genesis with that of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. At two earlier points in the book, the faithful primeval patriarchs are described as those who "walked with God" (*hithallek ʾet-hāᵃlōhîm*, 5:22, 24; 6:9). The faith of the early fathers was at one with that of the patriarchs — they walked with God.

At the same time this description of God also serves to link the faith of the fathers to that of the later generations of God's covenantal people. As Moses said in Deuteronomy 30:16, the essence of the covenantal relationship was that God's people were to love God and "walk in his ways" (*lāleket bidrākāyw*); and as the prophets were later to say,"What does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic 6:8).

Jacob's short catechism of faith, then, provides a theological link connecting and identifying faith throughout the ages. God is also described in Jacob's blessing as the "God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day" (v.15) and as the "Angel who has delivered me from all harm" (v.16). It is unusual that God should be described as "the Angel" (*hammalʾāk*), since earlier in the book it is said that God sent "his angel" (*malʾākô*, 24:7) or simply that one of the patriarchs was visited by "the angel of the LORD" (*malʾak yhwh*, 22:11).

The blessing of the two sons picks up the theme of the promise to Abraham. They are to be called by Jacob's "name" (šᵉmî, lit., "my name") and the "name" of Abraham and Isaac, just as God promised Abraham: "I will make your name [šᵉmekā] great" (12:2). They are to "increase greatly" (v.16), just as God promised Abraham, "I will make you into a great nation" (12:2).

17 – 20 The central focus of this section underscores the fact that Ephraim, the younger son, is given preeminence over Manasseh, his elder. There is an interesting reversal of the scene in which Jacob received the blessing from his father, Isaac, in ch. 27. Isaac, nearly blind, was deceived into blessing the younger son rather than the older. Nearly blind himself (v.10), Jacob appeared to be making the same mistake. When Joseph attempts to correct him, however, Jacob states his intentions clearly: "His younger brother will be greater than he" (v.19). The writer reinforces his words by stating further that "he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh" (v.20).

We may well ask why there is such concern over whether Ephraim or Manasseh is first, especially in light of the fact that in the next chapter it is Judah, and neither Joseph nor his two sons, who receives the preeminent position. This issue of preeminence is meant to address the larger question of who stands in a position to receive God's blessing. Throughout these narratives, receiving the blessing God offers does not rest with one's natural status or rights. On the contrary, that blessing is based solely on God's grace. The one to whom the blessing does not belong by natural right becomes heir of the promise.

21 – 22 These last two verses are difficult to understand not only in the immediate context but also within the context of the picture of Jacob that emerges from the narratives of Genesis as a whole. Jacob has been pictured not as a man of "sword and . .. bow" (v.22) but as "a quiet man, staying among the tents" (25:27). Elsewhere Jacob said of the Canaanites, "If they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed" (34:30). Now on his deathbed, Jacob reveals another side of himself as he bequeathes to Joseph the portion of land he took by force. Though he speaks to Joseph, his use of the plural pronouns ("with you," ʾimmākem, v.21) shows that he is addressing a larger audience. That audience appears to be the house of Joseph, which will be represented in the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

NOTES

3 Jacob refers to the site of Bethel by the earlier name לוּז (*lûz*, "Luz"; cf. 28:19).

15 The LXX has αὐτούς (*autous*, "them") in place of אֶת־יוֹסֵף (*ʾet-yôsēp*, "Joseph").The MT is the more original, in the light of its difficulty, though the LXX no doubt has the proper sense of the passage. Though Joseph is the one blessed, it is the two sons ("these boys," v.16) — who are the focus of the blessing.

3. Jacob's Sons Blessed (49:1 – 28)

[1]Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you
what will happen to you in days to come.
[2]"Assemble and
listen, sons of Jacob;
listen to your father Israel.
[3]"Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might, the first sign of my strength,
excelling in honor, excelling in power.
[4]Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel,
for you went up onto your father's bed,
onto my couch and defiled it.
[5]"Simeon and Levi are brothers —
their swords are weapons of violence.
[6]Let me not enter their council,
let me not join their assembly,
for they have killed men in their anger
and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.
[7]Cursed be their anger, so fierce,
and their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.
[8]"Judah, your brothers will praise you;
your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;

your father’s sons will bow down to you.
9 You are a lion’s cub, O Judah;
you return from the prey, my son.
Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?
10 The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs
and the obedience of the nations is his.
11 He will tether his donkey to a vine,
his colt to the choicest branch;
he will wash his garments in wine,
his robes in the blood of grapes.
12 His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.
13 “Zebulun will live by the seashore
and become a haven for ships;
his border will extend toward Sidon.
14 “Issachar is a rawboned donkey
lying down between two saddlebags.
15 When he sees how good is his resting place
and how pleasant is his land,
he will bend his shoulder to the burden
and submit to forced labor.
16 “Dan will provide justice for his people
as one of the tribes of Israel.
17 Dan will be a serpent by the roadside,
a viper along the path,
that bites the horse’s heels
so that its rider tumbles backward.
18 “I look for your deliverance, OLORD.
19 “Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders,
but he will attack them at their heels.
20 “Asher’s food will be rich;
he will provide delicacies fit for a king.
21 “Naphtali is a doe set free
that bears beautiful fawns.
22 “Joseph is a fruitful vine,

a fruitful vine near a spring,
whose branches climb over a wall.
[23]With bitterness archers attacked him;
they shot at him with hostility.
[24]But his bow remained steady,
his strong arms stayed limber,
because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,
because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,
[25]because of your father's God, who helps you,
because of the Almighty, who blesses you
with blessings of the heavens above,
blessings of the deep that lies below,
blessings of the breast and womb.
[26]Your father's blessings are greater
than the blessings of the ancient mountains,
than the bounty of the age-old hills.
Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,
on the brow of the prince among his brothers.
[27]"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
in the morning he devours the prey,
in the evening he divides the plunder."
[28]All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 The poem of ch. 49 plays a key role in the overall strategy of the patriarchal narratives as well as in the strategy of the book as a whole (see Introduction). Jacob's last words to his sons become the occasion for a final statement of the book's major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing through the "seed" of Abraham. The key to the writer's understanding of Jacob's last words lies in the narrative framework that surrounds them. In v.1 we are explicitly told that Jacob was speaking about those things that would happen "in the last days" (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*; NIV, "in days to come").

This expression occurs as an introduction to two other poems in the

Pentateuch: the oracles of Balaam (Nu 24:14 – 24) and the last words of Moses (Dt 31:29). On all three occasions the subject matter introduced by the phrase "in days to come" is that of God's future deliverance of a seed of Abraham. At the center of that deliverance stands a king (Ge 49:10; Nu 24:7; Dt 33:5). In Genesis 49 this king is connected with the house of Judah.

At the close of Jacob's discourse (v.28), the writer goes out of his way to draw a line connecting Jacob's words here to the theme of "the blessing," which has been a central concern of the book since 1:28. He does this by repeating the word *brk* ("bless, blessing") three times in the short span of v.28, "And he blessed [*wayʿbārek*] them, each according to his blessing [*kʿbirkātô*] he blessed [*bērak*] them." By framing Jacob's last words between v.1 and v.28 with the theme of "blessing," the writer shows where his interests lie. While Jacob's words look to the future ("in the last days"), they draw on the past, viz., God's blessing of humankind. It is within this context that we are to read and understand Jacob's words in this chapter.

The order of the sons follows roughly the order of the record of their birth (chs. 29 – 30). The sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar) lead the list, followed by the sons of the handmaidens Bilhah (Dan), Zilpah (Gad, Asher), and again Bilhah (Naphtali), and then the sons of Rachel (Joseph, Benjamin).

3 – 4 The key to the saying regarding Reuben is the statement "you will not excel" (*ʾal-tôtar*, v.4; NIV, "no longer excel"). The word "excel" is a play on the two statements that have preceded it: "excelling [*yeter*] in honor" and "excelling [*yeter*] in power." Though Reuben has excelled, he will no longer excel.The reason given is brief but to the point: "for you went up onto . . . my couch and defiled it." This refers to an episode briefly noted in 35:22: "While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it." As with the rest of these sayings, the message is terse and to the point. The point, of course, is that Reuben no longer has the right of the firstborn of the household of Jacob because he violated the honor of his father.

Ultimately, the purpose behind these initial sayings is the elimination of the otherwise rightful heirs to make room for Judah and Joseph at the top. Many

years later the author of the book of Chronicles offered the following commentary on this poem in Genesis 49:

> [Reuben] was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, and though Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph. (1Ch 5:1 – 2)

In his reference to the sons of Joseph taking the birthright, the Chronicler was no doubt thinking of Genesis 48:5, where Jacob said, "Ephraim and Manasseh [the two sons of Joseph] will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine."

5 – 7 Simeon and Levi are grouped together because they were the instigators of the bloodshed against the city of Shechem (34:25). At that time Jacob protested vehemently against the two sons and their attack on the defenseless city (34:30). Here Jacob gives his final verdict on their action: the two tribes of Levi and Simeon will not have their own portion in the inheritance of the land (cf. v.7). In fulfillment of Jacob's words, (1) the tribe of Simeon virtually disappears from the biblical narratives after the time of the conquest, and (2) the tribe of Levi, which ultimately redeemed itself by siding with Moses in the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32), was appointed to the priesthood and hence not given its own inheritance in the apportioning of the land.

8 – 12 Having eliminated the older brothers as heirs of the blessing, Jacob foretells a future for the tribe of Judah that pictures him as the preeminent son. We have seen that the author of the book of Chronicles did not read Jacob's words to mean that Judah was given the right of the firstborn, which, according to Genesis 48:5, belonged to Joseph (1Ch 5:1 – 2). Though he did not have the right of the firstborn, Judah was chosen over the others as the royal tribe. According to Chronicles, Judah "prevailed" (1Ch 5:2; NIV, "was the strongest") over his brothers and thus became heir to the throne. As Psalm 78:67 – 68 later put it, "[The LORD] rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved." As is suggested in both of these later texts, the words of Jacob regarding Judah in Genesis 49 anticipate in many details the future rise of David to Israel's throne.

Unlike the imagery used of the other sons, Jacob's words regarding Judah are transparent, though they are, of course, made up of poetic images. Judah is

described as a victorious warrior who returns home from battle and is greeted by the shouts of praise from his brothers. The parallelism of v.8 is extended by the statement, “your father’s sons will bow down [*yištaḥᵃwû*] to you.” This is probably an allusion to Joseph’s dream (37:10) in which his father’s sons would come to bow down before him. In other words, what was to happen to Joseph — and did, in fact, happen in the course of Genesis (e.g., 42:6) — has been transferred to the house of Judah. What happened to Joseph is portrayed as a picture of what will happen to Judah “in days to come.”

The image of the victorious warrior is extended with the picture of Judah as a “young lion” (*gûr ʾaryēh*; NIV, “lion’s cub,” v.9). The young lion is pictured as sleeping in its den after having just taken its prey. The question at the end of v.9 speaks for itself: “Who dares to rouse him?” In v.10 the picture is filled out with a description of the young warrior as a king. He is the one who holds the “scepter” and the “ruler’s staff.” The point of Jacob’s words is that Judah will hold such a status among the tribes of Israel until one comes “to whom it belongs.” Those who reign from the house of Judah will do so in anticipation of the one to whom the kingship truly belongs.

The word “Shiloh,” found in some English versions, is simply an untranslated form of the Hebrew expression meaning “one to whom it belongs.” It is not a name as such, nor is it to be associated with the site of the tabernacle in the days of Samuel (1Sa 1:3; see Notes). The individual pictured in this poem is identified in Genesis 27:29 and Numbers 24:9 with the “seed” of Abraham in Genesis 12:3 and 22:18. He is a royal seed from the house of Judah (see discussion on 12:1 – 5).

The most startling aspect of the description of this one from the tribe of Judah comes next: “and the obedience of the nations is his” (v.10b). The use of the plural “nations” (*ʿammîm*) rather than the singular “nation” (*ʿam*) suggests that Jacob has in view a kingship that extends beyond the boundaries of the sons of Israel to include the nations. There may be an anticipation of this view in God’s promise to Jacob in 28:3 and 48:4: “I will make you a community of peoples” (*ʿammîm*).

In any case, later biblical writers were apparently guided by texts such as this one in formulating their view of the universal reign of the future Davidic king. Examples of this theme can be seen in various passages:

Psalm 2:8: Ask of me, and I will make the nations [gôyim] your inheritance.

Daniel 7:13 – 14: There before me was one like a son of man. . . . He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him.

Revelation 5:5, 9: See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. . . . And they sang a new song: “You are worthy . . . with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

Verses 11 – 12 draw an extended picture of the reign of this one from the tribe of Judah. In his day there will again be abundance. Poetically the notion of plentitude is expressed with images of a donkey tethered to the choicest of vines and clothing washed in vintage wine (v.11).The sense of the imagery is that wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so plentiful that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden, and vintage wine will be as commonplace as water for washing.

Verse 12 returns to the picture of the king of Judah. His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. He is a picture of strength and power. Later biblical writers drew heavily from the imagery of this short text in their portrayal of the reign of the coming Messiah. In the book of Revelation this image is applied to the victorious return of Christ.

Jacob’s words regarding the remaining sons, with the exception of Joseph, are noticeable not only for their brevity but also for their cryptic allusions to epic events that at the time lay yet in the future of a particular tribe. True to the poetic qualities of the text, the images of the destiny of the remaining sons are, in most cases, based on wordplays of the sons’ names. The central theme uniting each image is that of prosperity. Just as with the image of the victorious king from the tribe of Judah reigning over all the nations in a time of rich blessing, so also will each of the remaining brothers experience the same sort of prosperity and blessing.

13 Zebulun, whose boundaries in Joshua 19:10 – 16 do not touch the sea, will extend its borders to the sea as far as Sidon. The Hebrew name "Zebulun" (*zᵉbûlun*), which means "lofty abode," has become a cipher for the extension of the land into the "far recesses" (*yarkātô*; NIV, "his border") of Sidon. There may be a wordplay between "abode" (*zᵉbûlun*) and "abide" (*yiškōn*; NIV, "will live").

14 – 15 Issachar (*yiśśākār*), whose name makes a play on the word "wages" (*śākār*; cf. 30:18), is pictured as a strong donkey that sees that his land of rest is good (*ṭôb*) and applies his back to the burden. The expression "he sees how good is his resting place" (*wayyarᵓ mᵉnuḥâ kî ṭôb*) may be an allusion to Genesis 1, where the similar expression, "and God saw that it was good" (*wayyarᵓ ʾlōhîm kî-ṭôb*), is a reminder that God's purpose in creation was to provide what is "good" (*ṭôb*) for humankind. The use of the term "resting place" (*mᵉnuḥâ*) aligns the words of Jacob with the theme of the future rest God will give to the chosen people.

16 – 17 Dan (*dān*) whose name is a wordplay on the expression "he will judge" (*yādîn*), is the one who will judge his people. He is likened to a snake along the path that attacks the heels of the horse and cunningly defeats the horseman. Though the sense of the image is unclear, Jacob's final words regarding Dan show that the image was meant in a positive way: "I look for your deliverance, O LORD" (v.18).

18 Breaking in, as it does, on the increasingly terse poetic images, this expression of hope in the Lord's deliverance provides a much-needed clue to the meaning of Jacob's words. In the individual destiny of the sons is embodied a hope in the future king from the tribe of Judah.

19 The brief statement regarding Gad contains a wordplay on nearly every word: "Gad [*gād*] will be attacked [*yᵉgûdennû*] by a band of raiders [*gᵉdûd*], but he will attack [*yāgud*] them at their heels." Though it is terse, the saying is in line with the others that follow in the path of the prophecy of Judah. It gives expression to a future hope of redemption.

20 The statement regarding Asher has no clear wordplays, but its meaning is self-evident. In the future Asher's sons will enjoy great abundance and rich delicacies.

21 The words regarding Naphtali are also brief. The picture they present, which is similar to the others, is of a time of future prosperity and abundance.

22 – 26 As might be expected from the importance of Joseph in the previous chapters, Jacob has much to say about the future of this son's tribe. In substance Jacob's statements regarding Joseph repeat much of what was said about the other brothers after Judah. The striking difference in these words is the repetition of the word "blessing" (*bᵉrākâ*). Whereas Jacob's words about the other brothers paint a picture of their future well-being and thus figuratively speak of a future blessing, Jacob's words to Joseph explicitly refer to this future as a "blessing." Thus, the words to Joseph are in line with all of those earlier passages in Genesis that speak of a promised "blessing" and prepare the way for the writer's final remarks about Jacob's words in v.28: "he blessed them, each according to his blessing, he blessed them" (lit. trans.). The reference to the "Shepherd" in v.24 is an allusion to Jacob's earlier blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (48:15).

27 The picture of Benjamin is similar to that of Judah. Both depict the patriarchs' future in terms expressing a victorious conquest. The conqueror is a lion and a wolf. The stark simplicity of these words to Benjamin, however, brings out the sense of sudden victory and conquest in much stronger terms than the imagery of Judah.

28 The writer sums up in unequivocal terms the substance of Jacob's words to his sons. They are an expression of the blessing (*wayᵉbārek*, "when he blessed") that is to be passed through the "seed" of Abraham. Within Jacob's words to each of his sons (after Judah), the theme of blessing has been evident in two primary images. First, the reverse side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of the victorious warrior. The defeat of the enemy is the prelude to the messianic peace. Second, the positive side of the blessing is stressed in the imagery of great prosperity and abundance.

Behind such imagery of peace and prosperity lies the picture of the garden of Eden — the paradise lost. The focus of Jacob's words has been the promise that when the one comes to whom the kingship truly belongs, there will once again be the peace and prosperity that God has intended for all in the garden of Eden.

NOTES

1 See the discussion in the Introduction on בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים (*bᵉʾaḥᵃrît hayyāmîm*, "in the last days").

4 The פָּחַזְתָּ (*pāḥaztā*, "you are turbulent") of the Samaritan Pentateuch and apparently the versions is not to be preferred to פַּחַז (*paḥaz*, "[he is] turbulent") in the MT. Such elliptical clauses are not uncommon in poetic texts (König, *Genesis*, 725).

5 The translation "their swords" for מְכֵרֹתֵיהֶם (*mᵉkērōtêhem*) is derived from the attempt to connect it with the Greek μάχαιρα (*machaira*) because of the similarity of the consonants. More recently its meaning has been derived from the Ethiopic *mkr* (see KB), meaning "to advise"; thus, "Weapons of violence are their counsels" (James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1968], 57).

8 There is a wordplay between the name יְהוּדָה (*yᵉhûdâ*, "Judah") and יוֹדוּךָ (*yôdûkā*, "will praise you"). The last clause — יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ (*yištaḥᵃwû lᵉkā bᵉnê ʾābîkā*, "your father's sons will bow down to you") — breaks the pattern (three x three bicola); however, it also plays an important role in linking the words about Judah to the dreams of Joseph in the preceding narratives (cf. 37:10; 42:6; 43:26, 28).

9 The words כָּרַע רָבַץ כְּאַרְיֵה וּכְלָבִיא מִי יְקִימֶנּוּ (*kāraʿ rābaṣ kᵉaryēh ûkᵉlābîʾ mî yᵉqîmennû*, "Like a lion he crouches and lies down/ like a lioness, who dares rouse him?") are repeated in Balaam's oracle in Numbers 24:9a and applied in that poem to the future king from the house of Jacob. (The use of the plurals in the NIV of Nu 24:9 are not in the Hebrew text.) The citation here of Numbers 24 connects the two poetic texts and identifies this royal son of Judah in Genesis 49 with the future king who will bring God's people again out of Egypt (Nu 24:7 – 24). Thus within the Pentateuch Jacob's vision of the future "last days" is brought further along and developed in terms familiar to the prophetic books, e.g., Hosea 2:2; 3:4 – 5; 11:1 – 5 (see John H. Sailhamer, "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15," *WTJ* 63 [2001]: 87 – 96). Balaam further links Genesis 49:8 – 12 to the promise to Abraham in his statement, "May those who bless you be blessed and those who curse you be cursed," which is a citation of 27:29 and 12:3 (see commentary on 12:1 – 5).

10 A considerable amount of discussion has centered on the meaning of the term “Shiloh.” It is often taken as a proper name (cf. KJV), referring either to the place where the ark was kept during the days before the capture of Jerusalem (1Sa 1 – 4) or to the future Messiah (cf. *Scofield Reference Bible*, 68: “Christ [first advent]”).The place of the ark in 1 Samuel and elsewhere, however, is written שִׁלֹה (*šilōh*), שִׁלוֹ (*šilô*), or שִׁילוֹ (*šîlô*), not שִׁילֹה (*šîlōh*), as here. The textual tradition was careful to distinguish the two forms, though it is not without exception — the *Qere* has *šîlô* for 49:10, and some MSS have *šilōh* or *šîlô* in the text (see Doederlein and Meisner, *Biblica Hebraica*, 79). The tradition that *šilōh* is the name of the Messiah can be traced back to the Talmudic period (Jacob, 904), though it may already be reflected in Revelation 19:11 – 13, where, amid numerous allusions to the imagery of Genesis 49:8 – 12, the Messiah is described as one who “has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.”

Others take *šilōh* to be a noun (like נִיצוֹץ, *nîṣôṣ*, “spark”; König, *Genesis*, 730) from the root שָׁלָה (*šālâ*, “to be peaceful”). Thus *šilōh* is the “man of peace” (e.g., שַׂר שָׁלוֹם, *śar šālôm*, Isaiah 9:6[5]). If we revocalize *šilōh* it can be read as *šay lô* (“the one to whom tribute [*šay*] belongs”) or *šilōh* (“the one [*šel*] to whom it belongs [*lōh*]”; cf. Jnh 1:12b: שֶׁלִּי, *šellî*, “fault”). This last form has the support of the Aramaic versions as well as some MSS of the LXX (cf. Eze 21:27).The term יִקְהַת (*yiqhat*) is from יָקְהָה (*yaqāhâ*) or יִקְהָה (*yiqhâ*) and means “obedience” (KB, 411; cf. Pr 30:17).

4. Jacob’s Burial Instructions Repeated (49:29 – 33)

29 Then he gave them these instructions: “I am about to be gathered to my
people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the
Hittite, 30 the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which
Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the
field. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his
wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave
in it were bought from the Hittites.”
33 When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his
feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

COMMENTARY

29 – 33 As Jacob lies dying, he once more makes a request that his sons bury him with his fathers (v.29). The specific place he has in mind is “Machpelah” (v.30), the burial place purchased by Abraham in ch. 23. Although Jacob made a similar request in 47:29 – 30, this final request is more specific. He wants to be buried in the land with Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah (v.31), the central figures of the preceding narratives. The point of this request is to show that Jacob’s faith in God’s promises remain firm to the end. With such an expression of faith still on his lips, the narrative concludes: “he . . . breathed his last and was gathered to his people” (v.33).

Q. Jacob’s Death and Burial (50:1 – 14)

[1]Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him.
[2]Then Joseph directed the physicians in his service to embalm his father
Israel. So the physicians embalmed him, [3]taking a full forty days, for that
was the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians mourned for him
seventy days.

[4]When the days of mourning had passed, Joseph said to Pharaoh’s court,
“If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me. Tell him,
[5]‘My father made me swear an oath and said, “I am about to die; bury me in
the tomb I dug for myself in the land of Canaan.” Now let me go up and
bury my father; then I will return.’ ”

[6]Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear to
do.”

[7]So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh’s officials
accompanied him — the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of
Egypt — [8]besides all the members of Joseph’s household and his brothers
and those belonging to his father’s household. Only their children and their
flocks and herds were left in Goshen. [9]Chariots and horsemen also went up
with him. It was a very large company.

[10]When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they
lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period
of mourning for his father. [11]When the Canaanites who lived there saw the
mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “The Egyptians are

holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim.

[12]So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them: [13]They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. [14]After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, together with his brothers and all the others who had gone with him to bury his father.

COMMENTARY

1 – 14 Over half the final chapter is occupied with a description of the mourning and burial of Jacob. Joseph himself mourns (v.1) and then the Egyptians (v.3). Great preparations are made both by Joseph and the Egyptians (v.2). Pharaoh grants a special request to bury Jacob in his homeland (vv.4 – 5), and he provides a large entourage as a burial processional to carry Jacob's body back to Canaan. "All Pharaoh's officials . . . and all the dignitaries of Egypt" (v.7) along with Pharaoh's chariots and horsemen accompany Joseph on his journey back to Canaan. Even the Canaanites recognize this as "a very large [*kābēd*, lit., 'heavy'; NIV, 'solemn'] ceremony of mourning" (v.11).

NOTE

1 Chapter 50 follows closely on ch. 49. The two narratives are connected by a wordplay וַיֶּאֱסֹף ... וַיֹּסֶף (*wayyeʾĕsōp* ... *wayyōsēp*, "he drew . . . and was gathered") with יוֹסֵף (*yōsēp*, "Joseph"; see Notes on 30:23).

VII. The Final Joseph Narrative (50:15 – 26)

A. Joseph's Forgiveness (50:15 – 21)

15When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said,
"What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the
wrongs we did to him?" 16So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father
left these instructions before he died: 17'This is what you are to say to
Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they
committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the
servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him,
Joseph wept.

18His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We
are your slaves," they said.

19But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20You intended to harm me,
but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21So
then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke
kindly to them.

COMMENTARY

15 – 21 The narrative turns once more to the scene of Joseph and his brothers and in so doing returns to the central theme of the narratives about Joseph: "You intended to harm [*rāʿâ*, lit., 'evil'] me, but God intended it for good [*lᵉṭōbâ*]. . . [to] the saving of many lives [*lᵉhalᵡyōt ʿam-rab*]" (v.20). Behind the events and human plans recounted in the story of Joseph lies the unchanging plan of God. It is the same plan introduced from the beginning of the book, where God looked out at what he had created and saw that "it is good" (*ṭôb*, 1:4 – 31). Through his dealings with the patriarchs and Joseph, God continued to bring about his good plan. He remained faithful to the promises, and this narrative shows that God's people can continue to trust and believe that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Ro 8:28).

The last description of Joseph's dealings with his brothers is the statement that "he comforted them [*wayᵉnaḥēm ʾôtām*; NIV, 'reassured'] and spoke kindly to them [*wayᵉdabbēr ʿal-libbām*]" (v.21). It is difficult not to see in this picture of Joseph and his brothers a foreshadowing of the future community of the sons of Israel in exile awaiting their return to the land. To that same community the call went out by the prophet Isaiah to "comfort [*naḥᵃmû*] comfort [*naḥᵃmû*] my people, says your God. Speak tenderly [*dabbᵉrû ʿal-lēb*] to Jerusalem . . . she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins" (Isa 40:1 – 2).

B. Summary of Joseph's Life and Death (50:22 – 26)

22 Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a
hundred and ten years 23 and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children.
Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on
Joseph's knees.

24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will
surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he
promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." 25 And Joseph made the
sons of Israel swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid,
and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

26 So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they
embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

COMMENTARY

22 – 26 Though his words are few, the final statement of Joseph to his sons gives the clearest expression of the hope taught in these narratives. Again, as had his father Jacob, Joseph wants his bones returned to the land (v.25). Also like Jacob, he sees to it that his sons swear to return his bones when they return to the land. Though he knows he will die and not see the time when his sons return to the land, he nevertheless is able to express the hope and trust he has in God's promise: "God will surely come to your aid [*pāqōd yipqōd*] and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" (v.24).

As has been characteristic of the literary technique of the Joseph narratives, Joseph repeats a second time (cf. 41:32) his statement of trust in God's promise: "God will surely come to your aid [*pāqōd yipqōd*], and then you must carry my bones up from this place" (v.25).

NOTES

25 The פָּקֹד יִפְקֹד אֱלֹהִים (*pāqōd yipqōd ʾlōhîm*, "God will surely come to your aid") is perhaps an allusion to וַיהוָה פָּקַד (*wayhwh pāqād*, "Now the LORD was gracious") in 21: 1.

26 Genesis ends with the Israelites "in Egypt" (בְּמִצְרָיִם, *bᵉmiṣrāyim*). The narrative, however, does not end here. As in earlier segments of the book, the death of the patriarch is followed by a list of names that opens a new narrative of the events in the lives of the next generations. Such a list is found in the first verses of the next book, Exodus (cf. Ge 50:26 – Ex 1:5 with Ge 35:29 – 36:43).

EXODUS

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Introduction

1. Title and Theme
2. Authorship and Unity
3. Date of Writing
4. Text of Exodus
5. Date of the Exodus
6. Route of the Exodus
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1. TITLE AND THEME

The name “Exodus,” which is of Greek origin, comes from the LXX name for the second book of the Pentateuch. “Exodus” means “exit, departure,” or “exodus [from Egypt]” (cf. its usage in Lk 9:31 [NIV, “departure”] and Heb 11:22). This name was retained also by the Vulgate, the Latin version; by the Jewish author Philo, who was a contemporary of Christ; and by the Syriac version.

The name “Exodus” is a proper designation only for the first part of the book (1:1 – 15:21, where the concept of God, Moses, or Moses and Aaron “leading [the people] out” of Egypt is a frequent assertion [e.g., 3:10 – 12; 6:6, 26, 27; 7:4; 12:17; 13:3, etc.]). The second half of the book describes the covenant God made with Israel (15:22 – 40:38). But the name is so enshrined in history that it has become the most convenient way to refer to the entire book.

The Hebrew name for the book derives from the first words of the text: “And these are the names of ” (*wᵉʾēlleh šᵉmôt*), or simply *Shemoth*. This phrase occurs also in Genesis 46:8, where it likewise introduces a list of the names of those Israelites “who entered Egypt with Jacob” (1:1). This connecting phrase and the observation that the book begins with the conjunction “and” emphasize the fact that Exodus was never intended to exist separately but was thought of as a

continuation of a narrative that began in Genesis and was completed in three more books, making up the first division of the Hebrew canon known as *Torah* (“law, instruction, teaching”) or, since the second century AD, “the Pentateuch” (i.e., “the five books”).

The text of this book is most insistent that the promises God made in Genesis are partially fulfilled in Exodus. Thus the promise of the multiplication of the human race promised in creation (Ge 1:28) is evidenced in the rapid growth of the Israelites (Ex 1:7). The promise of the land could only be fulfilled if Israel was delivered from Egypt and brought back into the land of Canaan, which had been promised to them (e.g., Ge 12:7; 15:13 – 16). Accordingly, Exodus refuses all critical attempts to any isolationism or a major disconnect from the promises and times that preceded it.

In the Pentateuch as a whole there are six major themes:

1. God’s blessing on all nature and humanity
2. God’s promise to the patriarchs
3. God’s deliverance in the exodus from Egypt
4. God’s self-revelation in covenant, law, and tabernacling presence at Sinai
5. The wandering in the wilderness
6. Preparation for entrance into Canaan

Three of these six major themes (numbers 3 – 5) are given extensive treatment in the second book of the Pentateuch, and thus Exodus forms the heart of the Torah.

2. AUTHORSHIP AND UNITY

There are several internal claims in Exodus that directly ascribe authorship to Moses. He is told to record on a scroll the episode of Israel’s victory over Amalek (17:14). He is instructed to write down the Ten Commandments (34:4, 27 – 29). He “wrote down everything the LORD had said” (24:4), which included at least the book of the covenant (20:22 – 23:33).

These internal claims are supported by a strong association of Mosaic authorship with these same materials in other OT books, such as Joshua 1:7;

8:31 – 32; 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 14:6; Ezra 6:18; Nehemiah 13:1; Daniel 9:1 – 13; and Malachi 4:4.

The NT writers likewise support Mosaic authorship of Exodus. Mark 12:26 locates Exodus 3:6 in“the book of Moses,” while Luke 2:22 – 23 assigns Exodus 13:2 to both “the Law of Moses” and “the Law of the Lord.” Mark 7:10 attributes the fifth commandment (Ex 20:12) and one of the laws from the book of the covenant (21:17) to Moses. John (Jn 7:19) also joins in this chorus of witnesses who attribute the law to Moses. (For Mosaic authorship of other portions of the Pentateuch in the NT, see John 5:46 – 47; Ac 3:22; Ro 10:5.)

It was the fad in the twentieth century to deny the historical reality of the man Moses. In 1922, Holscher described Moses as a legend created by the priests of Kadesh. In 1931, Grossman attributed the story of Moses to the genre of saga. These conclusions were broadly shared by most critical scholars of that century. But hard questions were left unanswered by this group of researchers: (1) Why did Israel give Moses an Egyptian name? (2) Why would Israel embarrass itself by inventing a period of Egyptian oppression? (3) Why not suppress the negative aspects of the story, such as the time of bondage in Egypt, Aaron’s great failure at the golden calf, and Moses’ failure when he smote the rock? (4) Who are the otherwise unknown priests of Kadesh? Instead of concluding that Moses was a mythically invented character, we are left with no explanation for Israel’s appearance on the historical canvas at all when we try to explain the emergence of this nation at this time without the presence of a Moses or an Aaron.

Traditionally many scholars assume that Exodus derived from earlier editions of the story, which in turn used still earlier, mainly oral, material. Three major sources are hypothesized: J (Yahwistic, c. 950 – 850 BC), E (Elohistic, c. 750 – 850 BC), and P (Priestly, c. 500 – 540 BC). In addition to these alleged three sources, the Ten Commandments and the book of the covenant are examples of material not found in any of these sources but which were known and incorporated by the author(s) or editor(s).

Little or no agreement exists, however, on the precise boundaries of these subjectively devised sources; nor can the criteria for their detection be demonstrated to be functionally operative and legitimate for similar documents from epigraphic materials from periods of similar antiquity. Moreover, and most

serious of all, these hypotheses directly oppose the clear internal claims of Exodus and the supporting external attributions of Mosaic authorship as noted above. Even apart from the question of inspiration, it is best first to take a text (whether secular or sacred) on its own terms and claims. In other words, a text should be judged innocent until proven guilty, rather than vice versa.

3. DATE OF WRITING

Since Moses first became involved with leading the Israelites after his eightieth birthday (7:7), the date for the composition of Exodus must fall between his eightieth birthday and his one hundred and twentieth birthday, at which age he died, just as the wilderness wandering was drawing to a close (Dt 34:7).Thus the approximate date for the composition of this second book of the Pentateuch rests on the date set for the exodus from Egypt.

4. TEXT OF EXODUS

The Hebrew text of Exodus is best preserved by Codex Leningradensis (B19a), which was edited by Gottried Quell and published in 1973 under the title of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 2* in Stuttgart, Germany.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have preserved a great deal of the text of Exodus, which on the whole shows similar readings to the Masoretic text found in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia 2*. Originally, Fitzmyer listed forty-seven passages of the text of Exodus preserved in the Dead Sea Scrolls,[1] along with phylacteries and *mezuzot* of the Hebrew text of Exodus 12:43 – 13:16 and 20:7 – 12. The variations from the Masoretic tradition are few indeed.

Therefore, despite the antiquity of the Hebrew text of Exodus, it bears a most remarkably unified tradition in all of its known textual traditions. Readers might consult Judith Sanderson’s work for more explicit details on the text of Exodus, especially on the remarkable paleo-Exodus text.[2]

The book of Exodus exhibits a number of literary forms. The greater part of the text is in prose; narrative prose is the main literary form in the first nineteen chapters. At this point in Exodus, lists of apodictic or casuistic laws take over with detailed specifications on worship procedures and matters relating to priestly offices, duties, and rituals. A few poetic sections have been identified, such as the renowned poetry of 15:1b – 18, 21 along with a possible three-line poem identified by Childs.[3]

5. DATE OF THE EXODUS

The book of Exodus nowhere gives us specific enough data to link biblical events definitively with Egyptian chronology. We only know about “a new king, who did not know about Joseph” (1:8), or an anonymous “pharaoh” (1:11, 19, 22; 2:15) or a “king” of Egypt (1:15; 2:23). It is noteworthy, however, that “pharaoh,” which means “great house” and designates the king’s residence and household, became for the first time in the Eighteenth Dynasty of Egypt a title for the king himself. Thus, even though 2:23 tells us that the king of the oppression died and, therefore, could not have been the Pharaoh of the exodus (cf. 4:19), we have no internal evidence to identify either of them specifically.

The identity of these two pharaohs has generally centered on two views: placing the Exodus under (1) pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty (c. 1580 - 1321 BC) and (2) pharaohs of the Nineteenth Dynasty, mainly in the thirteenth century (c. 1321 - 1205 BC). The two main pillars for the “late date,” or thirteenth-century theory, for Israel’s exodus are: (1) the two names for the store cities built by the Israelites in Egypt — Pithom and Rameses (1:11)—and (2) the archaeological discoveries at many Palestinian sites that have been interpreted to favor an Israelite conquest toward the end of the thirteenth century.

The commonly held late-date view, that work on Pithom and Rameses must have been carried out in the Nineteenth Dynasty of Rameses II (1290 - 1224 BC) and therefore the exodus must be dated in the thirteenth century BC, rests on two misconceptions: (1) the unnatural interpretation of Exodus 1:7 - 14 that the building of the cities (Pithom and Rameses) and the oppression of the Israelites commenced shortly before the exodus rather than in the Middle Kingdom of Egypt (i.e., prior to the Eighteenth Dynasty), and (2) the nature of the

archaeology of Canaan and its problematic dating.

(1) Exodus 1:7 - 14 places the building of these cities as one of the first tasks accomplished by these enslaved people. Since Israel's bondage spanned a number of centuries, not just decades, it is not difficult to assume that work on these cities was best remembered because it was among the first acts of their oppression.

Likewise, neither the name nor the location of these cities prevents an early date. Rameses is probably to be identified not with Tanis but with Qantir.[4] Pithom may be either Tell er-Retabeh, some nine miles west of the older suggested site of Tell el-Maskhuta (also in the Wadi Tumilat), or Heliopolis.[5] Our manuscripts of Exodus 1:11 simply give the city's name in the later period —Rameses instead of Qantir, just as Genesis 47:11 knows the area where Jacob's family settled when they arrived in Egypt as "the district of Rameses" (another retrospective usage or modernization of an older term; cf. "Dan" in Ge 14:14 for the older name "Laish," which was not changed until the time of the judges [Jdg 18:29]).

(2) The second pillar for the late-date view is just as problematic. For example, Jericho continues to be an anomaly for this view; for in spite of all the redating of the previous excavation levels, there is no evidence for a thirteenth-century city. Likewise, the claim that certain burned levels at sites such as Lachish, Bethel, Debir, and Hazor were caused by an Israelite invasion, mainly because they were followed by poor settlements alleged to be typical of earliest Israel after its poverty-ridden arrival from Egypt, is a weak argument. Even the association of the innovative collared-rim ware type of pottery as an objective piece of evidence of a new Israelite presence is hazardous, since no one similarly argues that the appearance of Palestinian imitations of Mycenaean ring ware from the earlier Grecian lands is objective evidence for a similar Mycenaean invasion.

Even more telling, Israel is recorded as deliberately burning few sites—only Jericho, Ai, and Hazor are described in the Bible as having suffered burning. In fact, Joshua 11:13 specifically rules out Israel's burning of any sites other than Hazor in her northern campaign. Thus the collapse of some of these sites with their burned levels may well indicate collapses attributable to Ammonite and

Philistine encroachments (Jdg 10:7) or forays from Egypt, such as the one Pharaoh Merneptah boasted about on his stele, not to mention the c. 1200 BC invasion of the Sea Peoples or the mutually destructive strife between tribes and cities as treated in Judges 19 – 20.

Likewise, the "early date" of the fifteenth century BC has two pillars: (1) the summarizing statement that there were 480 years (1Ki 6:1) from the exodus until the fourth year of Solomon (= 967 BC) and (2) the supporting data that three hundred years (Jdg 11:26) elapsed between Israel's entrance into Palestine and the commencement of the judge Jephthah's rule. Both texts set the exodus at c. 1446 BC, making Thutmose III the pharaoh of Israelite oppression.[6]

The historicity of both of these biblical numbers, however, has frequently been rejected by noting that one manuscript tradition of the Greek translation (LXX mss A and B) has the figure 440 years instead of the 480 of the Hebrew text, or by explaining 480 as a round number involving twelve units or generations estimated at forty years per generation. The first problem represents only a minor and therefore just a passing variant of textual tradition. Unfortunately for the twelve-generation theory, this too will be artificial on all counts: generations are more likely twenty than forty years, and there are actually eighteen generations, not just the stylized twelve generations, between the exodus and the time of Solomon according to the priestly line in 1 Chronicles 6:33 – 37. Neither can the attempt (albeit even by some conservative writers) to treat the forty years merely as symbolic numbers square with the internal evidence.

For example, the three hundred years that Israel had occupied Canaan up to Jephthah's day mentioned in Judges 11:26 may be accounted for as follows:

Description	Judges	# of Years
(1) Oppression by Cushan-Rishathaim,	3:8	8 years
Deliverance by Othniel and peace	3:11	40 years
(2) Oppression by Moabites,	3:14	18 years

Deliverance by Ehud and time of peace	3:30	80 years
(3) Oppression by Canaanite King Jabin,	4:3	20 years
Deliverance by Deborah/Barak and time of peace	5:31	40 years
(4) Oppression by Midianites,	6:1	7 years
Deliverance by Gideon and time of peace	8:28	40 years
Abimelech's reign	9:22	3 years
Tola's judgeship	10:2	23 years
Jair's judgeship	10:3	22 years
Years until Jephthah's time = 301		301 years
cf. Jdg 11:26 = 300		
(5) Oppression by Ammonites (on east side of the Jordan?)	10:8	18 years
Deliverance by Jephthah	12:7	6 years
Ibzan's judgeship	12:9	7 years
Elon's judgeship	12:11	10 years
Abdon's judgeship	12:14	8 years
(6) Oppression by Philistines (on the west side of the Jordan?) during which time Samson delivers Israel for 20 years	13:1, 5; 15:20; 16:31	40 years
TOTAL		390 years

Judges 10:7 – 8 strongly suggests that the fifth and sixth oppressions occurred simultaneously; thus the forty-seven years of the Ammonite oppression and the subsequent judges do not continue the chronology, since the story line continues into the book of Samuel from the Philistine oppression.

Even when we allow some additional fifteen to twenty years from Israel's entrance into the land and her division of the countryside among the tribes until the first oppression under Cushan-Rishathaim, the total for the first four oppressions, up to the time of Jephthah's judgeship, would be 301 years plus the estimated fifteen to twenty years and eighteen years of Ammonite oppression; therefore three hundred years as a round number is most acceptable. This fact warns us to take what would otherwise appear to be round numbers as fairly precise approximations of the actual time involved.

Our rough estimate of the total of 480 years from the exodus until Solomon's fourth regal year could be outlined as follows:

Description	Years Expended
a. Entrance into and division of the land	15 (20) [?]
b. Oppressions 1 – 4 with the deliverers of each (Cushan-Rishathaim to the judge Jair; Jdg 11:26) (see above chart)	301
c. Philistine oppression	40
d. Samuel's judgeship	40
e. Saul's rule	40
f. David's rule	40
g. Solomon's fourth year	4
1 Kings 6:1	480 years total

Accordingly, the material from the book of Judges is in keeping with the total years given in 1 Kings 6:1, and the general case made for the internal consistency of the biblical record for the early date of the exodus as c. 1446 BC

6. ROUTE OF THE EXODUS

The wilderness itinerary actually begins in Exodus 12:37. Typically the itinerary formula consisted of two elements: (1) the departure place name with the verb "to journey" and the preposition "from" (e.g., 12:37; 13:20; 16:1; 17:1; 19:2) and (2) the arrival location with the preposition "at" or "to" (13:20; 15:22; 16:1; and verbs such as "to camp" (13:20; 15:27) or "to come" (15:23, 27; 16:1).

The store cities of Rameses (best identified with Qantir on the Bubastite-Pelusiac eastern arm of the Nile River Delta) and Pithom (identified here as Tell-er Retabeh in the Wadi Tumilat)[7] were left behind. There were three possible routes of escape: (1) a shorter northeast route going to Qantara through the land of the Philistines (a route Israel was warned against taking in 13:17); (2) a middle route heading across the Negev to Beersheba (whose advocates incorrectly assume that Mount Sinai is Gebel Helal near Kadesh-Barnea); and (3) a southeastern route leading from the wilderness east of modern Ismailia to the southern extremities of the Sinai Peninsula. Israel took this southern route and headed for the "desert road toward the Red Sea" (13:18), presumably near the body of water by the same name that the Egyptians also called "The Sea of Reeds" (see comment on 13:18).

It is impossible to locate "Etham" exactly (13:20), but the region known as Atuma (a desert that begins at Lake Timsah and extends west and south of it, where the Egyptians knew that Asiatics grazed their flocks) is the most likely route (see Nu 33:6 – 8). It would appear that Israel turned back to the west and then turned south to go around the bulging upper part of the large Bitter Lake, only to go in a southeasterly direction between the mountain range of Jebel Jenefeh and the large and small Bitter Lakes.

The exact place Israel crossed the Red Sea is unknown, but it seems best to locate this famous crossing somewhere between the southern end of the Bitter Lakes and the Gulf of Suez or even in the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez itself,[8] rather than across Lake Ballah, [9] the southern end of Lake Menzaleh,[10] or the sandy strip of land that separates Lake Sirbonis (modern Lake Bardawil) from the Mediterranean Sea — an extreme suggestion of some.

The wilderness itinerary begun in Exodus 12:37 — and continued in 13:20; 14:2; and 15:22 — resumes after the crossing on the shores of the Red Sea on the western side of the Sinai Peninsula (in 15:22 – 27; see comments and Notes on these passages). Thus we conclude that the southern route, not the northern or middle route, was chosen by Israel and ordered by God.

7. THEOLOGY

Exodus contains some of the richest foundational theology in the OT. Preeminently, it lays the foundations for a theology of God's revelation of his person, his redemption, his law, and his worship. It also initiates the great institution of the priesthood and the role of the prophets and formalizes the covenantal relationship between God and his people.

Detailed disclosures of the nature of God are found in Exodus 3, 6, 33, and 34. These texts focus on the fact and significance of his presence (as given by his name "Yahweh" and his glory). But his attributes of justice, truthfulness, mercy, faithfulness, and holiness are also highlighted. Thus to know God's "name" is to know him and his character (3:13 – 15; 6:3).

God is also the Lord of history, for there is no one like him, "majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders" (15:11). Thus neither the affliction of Israel nor the plagues in Egypt were outside of his control. Pharaoh, the Egyptians, and all Israel would see the power of God.

Most reassuring of all is the fact that God remembers (2:24). The promises he had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob some four hundred to six hundred years earlier began coming to fruition as Israel left Egypt for the Promised Land. The covenant at Sinai was but another step in God's fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs (3:15 – 17; 6:2 – 8; 19:3 – 6).

The theology of deliverance and salvation is likewise a strong emphasis of the book. The verb to "redeem" (*gaì,al*, one who acts the part of a kinsman-redeemer) is used in 6:6 and 15:13. But the heart of redemption theology is best seen in the Passover narrative in ch. 12 along with the sealing of the covenant in

ch. 24. The apostle Paul saw the death of the Passover lamb fulfilled in Christ (1Co 5:7). Indeed, John the Baptist called Jesus the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29), just as the Last Supper was a celebration of the Passover meal. The Passover lamb, whose blood was applied to the doors of Israelite homes, (1) averted harm to that house, (2) provided a substitute that allowed the firstborn to live (12:13), and (3) propitiated the wrath of God so that the angel of death passed over the protected homes.

Exodus also tells us how we should live. The foundation of biblical ethics and morality is formally laid out for us first in the gracious character of God as revealed in the exodus and then in the Ten Commandments and the ordinances of the book of the covenant. From the illustrations of the cases in chs. 21 – 23, we learn how to apply in practice the principles of the ten words that in turn have their grounding in the permanency of the character of God.

The book concludes with an elaborate discussion of the theology of worship. The tabernacle was very costly in time, effort, and monetary value; yet in its significance and function it pointed to the chief end of human-kind: to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Above every other consideration is the fact that the omnipotent, unchanging, and transcendent God of the whole universe has, by means of the tabernacle, graciously come to "dwell" or "tabernacle" with his people, thereby revealing his immanence as well. Therefore, not only was God mighty in their midst, but he is the God who has been, is, and will be present in their midst as well.

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9. OUTLINE

I. Divine Redemption (1:1 – 18:27)

A. Fulfilled Multiplication and Forced Eradication (1:1 – 22)
1. The Promised Increase (1:1 – 7)
2. The First Pogrom (1:8 – 14)
3. The Second Pogrom (1:15 – 22)
B. Preparations for Deliverance (2:1 – 4:26)
1. Preparing a Leader (2:1 – 10)
2. Extending the Time of Preparation (2:11 – 22)
3. Preparing a People for Deliverance (2:23 – 25)
4. Calling a Deliverer (3:1 – 10)
5. Answering Inadequate Objections (3:11 – 4:17)
a. Who am I to go to Pharaoh? (3:11 – 12)
b. What if they ask what your name is? (3:13 – 22)
c. What if they will not believe me? (4:1 – 9)
d. What about my slow tongue? (4:10 – 12)
e. Why can you not find someone else? (4:13 – 17)
6. Preparing a Leader’s Family (4:18 – 26)
C. First Steps in Leadership (4:27 – 7: 5)
1. Reinforced by a Brother (4:27 – 31)
2. Rebuffed by the Enemy (5:1 – 14)
3. Rebuffed by the Enslaved (5:15 – 21)
4. Revisited by Old Objections (5:22 – 23)
5. Reinforced by the Name of God (6:1 – 8)
6. Reminders of Moses’ Lowly Origins (6:9 – 7:5)
D. Judgment and Salvation through the Plagues (7:6 – 11:10)
1. Presenting the Signs of Divine Authority (7:6 – 13)
2. First Plague: Water Turned to Blood (7:14 – 24)
3. Second Plague: Frogs (7:25 – 8:15)
4. Third Plague: Gnats (8:16 – 19)

5. Fourth Plague: Flies (8:20 – 32)
6. Fifth Plague: Cattle Murrain (9:1 – 7)
7. Sixth Plague: Boils (9:8 – 12)
8. Seventh Plague: Hail (9:13 – 35)
9. Eighth Plague: Locusts (10:1 – 20)
10. Ninth Plague: Darkness (10:21 – 29)
11. Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn (11:1 – 10)
E. The Passover (12:1 – 28)
1. Preparations for the Passover (12:1 – 13)
2. Preparations for the Unleavened Bread (12:14 – 20)
3. Celebration of the Passover (12:21 – 28)
F. The Exodus from Egypt (12:29 – 51)
1. Death at Midnight (12:29 – 32)
2. Preparations for the Exodus (12:33 – 36)
3. The Exodus and the Mixed Multitude (12:37 – 51)
G. The Consecration of the Firstborn (13:1 – 16)
H. Journey to the Red Sea (13:17 – 15:21)
1. Into the Wilderness (13:17 – 22)
2. At the Red Sea (14:1 – 14)
3. Across the Red Sea (14:15 – 31)
4. Song at the Sea (15:1 – 21)
I. Journey to Sinai (15:22 – 18:27)
1. The Waters of Marah (15:22 – 27)
2. The Manna and the Quail (16:1 – 36)
3. The Waters of Meribah (17:1 – 7)
4. The War with Amalek (17:8 – 16)
5. The Wisdom of Jethro (18:1 – 27)
II. Divine Morality (19:1 – 24:18)
A. The Eagles' Wings Speech (19:1 – 8)
B. The Advent of God on Sinai (19:9 – 25)
C. The Decalogue (20:1 – 17)
D. The Reaction of the People to the Theophany (20:18 – 21)
E. The Book of the Covenant (20:22 – 23:33)
1. The Prologue (20:22 – 26)
2. Laws on Slaves (21:1 – 11)
3. Laws on Homicide (21:12 – 17)
4. Laws on Bodily Injuries (21:18 – 32)
5. Laws on Property Damages (21:33 – 22:15)
6. Laws on Society (22:16 – 31)

7. Laws on Justice and Neighborliness (23:1 – 9)
8. Laws on Sacred Seasons (23:10 – 19)
9. Epilogue (23:20 – 33)
F. Ratification of the Covenant (24:1 – 18)
III. Divine Worship (25:1 – 40:38)
A. The Tabernacle (25:1 – 31:18)
1. Collection of Materials (25:1 – 9)
2. Ark and Mercy Seat (25:10 – 22)
3. Table of the Bread of the Presence (25:23 – 30)
4. Golden Lampstand (25:31 – 40)
5. Curtains, Framework,Veil, and Screen (26:1 – 37)
a. The tabernacle itself and its curtains (26:1 – 14)
b. The walls or the tabernacle's framework (26:15 – 30)
c. The tabernacle's arrangement and veil (26:31 – 35)
d. The tabernacle's screen (26:36 – 37)
6. Altar of Burnt Offering (27:1 – 8)
7. Court of the Tabernacle (27:9 – 19)
8. Priesthood (27:20 – 28:5)
9. Garments of the Priests (28:6 – 43)
10. Ordination of the Priests (29:1 – 46)
11. Altar of Incense (30:1 – 10)
a. Building instructions (30:1 – 6)
b. Operating instructions (30:7 – 10)
12. Census Tax (30:11 – 16)
13. Bronze Basin, Anointing Oil, and Incense (30:17 – 38)
14. Appointment of Craftsmen (31:1 – 11)
15. Sabbath Rest (31:12 – 17)
16. Conclusion to the Instructions (31:18)
B. False Worship of the Golden Calf (32:1 – 34:35)
1. Golden Calf (32:1 – 29)
2. Mediation of Moses (32:30 – 35)
3. Threatened Separation and Moses' Prayer (33:1 – 23)
4. Renewal of the Covenant (34:1 – 35)
C. Building the Tabernacle (35:1 – 40:38)
1. Summons to Build (35:1 – 19)
2. Voluntary Gifts (35:20 – 29)
3. Bezalel and His Artisans (35:30 – 36:7)
4. Progress of the Work and Moses' Blessing (36:8 – 39:43)
5. Erection of the Tabernacle (40:1 – 33)

6. Dedication of the Tabernacle (40:34 – 38)

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4. Cf. also Hershel Shanks, "The Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea, According to Hans Goedicke," *BAR* 7 (Sept - Oct 1981): 44, for evidence of Syro-Palestinian remains from 1700 - 1500 BC

5. See E. P. Uphill, "Pithom and Raamses: Their Location and Significance," *JNES* 27 (1968): 291 - 316; idem, "Pithom and Raamses: Their Location and Significance," JNES 28 (1969): 15 - 39.

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8. See Jack Finegan, *Let My People Go: A Journey Through Exodus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 85; C. Bourdon, "La Route d l'Exode," *RB* 41 (1932): 378 – 90.

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10. CHARTS

Synoptic Chart on the Tabernacle

Order: The command to build	Passage	Order: The execution of the plan
1. The Contribution to the Tabernacle	Ex 25:1 – 9	2. Ex 35:4 – 29
2. The Ark of the Covenant	Ex 25:10 – 22	7. Ex 37:1 – 9
3. The Table of the Bread of Presence	Ex 25:23 – 30	8. Ex 37:10 – 16
4. The Lampstand	Ex 25:31 – 40	9. Ex 37:17 – 24
5. The Tabernacle and the Tent	Ex 26:1 – 14	4. Ex 36:8 – 38
a. The Linen Curtains	Ex 26:1 – 6	a. Ex 36:8 – 13
b. The Goats' Hair Curtains	Ex 26:7 – 13	b. Ex 36:14 – 18
c. The Ram Skin Coverings	Ex 26:14	c. Ex 36:19
d. (The Silver Sockets)	(Ex 30:11 – 16)	d. (Ex 38:25 – 28)
6. The Posts/Frames	Ex 26:15 – 30	5. Ex 36:20 – 34
7. The [Inner] Curtain	Ex 26:31 – 37	6. Ex 36:35 – 38
8. The Altar of Burnt Offering	Ex 27:1 – 8	11. Ex 38:1 – 7
9. The Courtyard of the Tabernacle	Ex 27:9 – 19	13. Ex 38:9 – 20
10. The Priesthood	Ex 27:20 – 28:5	
11. The Priestly Garments	Ex 28:6 – 43	16. Ex 39:2 – 31
12. The Consecration of the Priests	Ex 29:1 – 46	
13. The Altar of Incense	Ex 30:1 – 10, 34 – 38	10. Ex 37:25 – 29
14. The Atonement Money	Ex 30:11 – 16	15. Ex 38:25 – 28
15. The Bronze Basin (Laver)	Ex 30:17 – 21	12. Ex 38:8
16. The Oil of Atonement	Ex 30:22 – 33	

17. The Incense of Spices	Ex 30:34 – 38	
18. The Appointment of Workers	Ex 31:1 – 11	3. Ex 35:30 – 36:7
19. The Rest from Work on the Sabbath	Ex 31:12 – 17	1. Ex 35:1 – 3
20. The Command to Erect the Tabernacle		17. Ex 40:1 – 16
21. The Erection of the Tabernacle		18. Ex 40:17 – 33
22. Inventory of Materials Used		14. Ex 38:21 – 39:1

Text and Exposition

I. DIVINE REDEMPTION (1:1 – 18:27)

A. Fulfilled Multiplication and Forced Eradication (1:1 – 22)

OVERVIEW

Exodus opens with the phrase, “And these are the names.” These words remind us that the book of Exodus is connected to the book of Genesis with its promise made to the patriarchs that God would increase the twelve sons of Jacob by multiplying their “seed.” Thus this population explosion points back to the divine promise in Genesis as much as it points forward to what is to come. However, three hundred silent years have passed between the end of the story of Joseph in Genesis 37 – 50 and its resumption here is Exodus(c.1800 – 1400 BC).

1. The Promised Increase (1:1 – 7)

OVERVIEW

The three prominent subjects of Exodus are (1) God’s plan for deliverance (Ex 1 – 19), (2) God’s guidance for morality (Ex 20 – 24), and (3) God’s order for worship (Ex 25 – 40). As the writer begins his work, however, another prominent fact that governs the whole theology of Exodus is immediately set forth: vv.1 – 7 are a virtual commentary on the ancient promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven and the sands of the sea (e.g., Ge 15:5; 22:17). In fact, as though to

underscore this connection with Genesis, vv.1 – 4 virtually repeat Genesis 35:22 – 26; v.5 is a reiteration of Genesis 46:27; v.6 of Genesis 50:26; and v.7 of Genesis 1:28.

There are, however, new features in these verses. The reference to “families” or “households” in v.1 is new, as is Joseph’s being treated separately from his brothers in v.5. So also is the notice in v.6 that “all that generation” along with Jacob’s twelve sons had died.

History, at once the scandal and the uniqueness of biblical faith, is the sphere of God’s revelation. While heathenism and modern scientific naturalism affirm that only *nature* is ultimately real, Greek philosophy and Oriental mysticism attempt to extricate humanity from both *nature* and *time*. In Exodus, both nature and time are real and not nuisances; they are participants in the fabric of God’s revelation. Thus our book begins with a list of names and takes us to real places and persons in the Near East.

> [1]These are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt with Jacob,
> each with his family: [2]Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah; [3]Issachar, Zebulun
> and Benjamin; [4]Dan and Naphtali; Gad and Asher. [5]The descendants of
> Jacob numbered seventy in all; Joseph was already in Egypt.
>
> [6]Now Joseph and all his brothers and all that generation died, [7]but the
> Israelites were fruitful and multiplied greatly and became exceedingly
> numerous, so that the land was filled with them.

COMMENTARY

1 The Hebrew title for “Exodus” (*wᵉʾelleh šᵉmôt* , lit., “And these are the names of ”) is the same phrase that appears in Genesis 46:8. This is the first example of a literary practice that appears in almost all the historical books of the OT: the use of the simple copulative “and” to begin a book (cf. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, 2 Chronicles). This feature indicates that the writer is conscious of the fact that he is contributing to an ongoing sequence of revelation and narration. (On this issue, see A. van Selms, “How Do Books of the Bible Commence?” in *Biblical Essays: Proceedings of the Ninth Meetings Held in July 1966*, ed. A. H. van Zyl [Stellenbosch: Univ. of

Stellenbosch Press, 1966], 132 – 41.)

2 – 4 The sons of Jacob's wives, Leah and Rachel, are placed in order of their seniority ahead of the sons of his two concubines — with the exception of Joseph, who is omitted because of the phrase in v.1: "who went to Egypt with Jacob." They are arranged in three series that are marked off by "and" in the Hebrew text: (1) the first four sons of Leah (Ge 29:31 – 35) are linked together in v.2; (2) the last two sons of Leah (30:18 – 20), after she had temporarily ceased bearing children, along with Benjamin, the second son of Rachel (35:18), are separated by an "and" in v.3; and (3) the sons of the handmaid Bilhah and the sons of the handmaid Zilpah (30:6 – 13) are each joined by "and" in v.4.

5 It is unnecessary to understand the number "seventy" as a symbol of perfection (so Cassuto) or with the misunderstood phrase in Deuteronomy 32:8, that the total number of the nations should be "according to the number of the sons of Israel" (i.e., the seventy in the table of nations of Ge 10). Instead, the family list in Genesis 46 gives this tally: the six men of Leah had twenty-five sons and two grandsons totaling thirty-three; the two sons of Rachel had twelve sons totaling fourteen; Bilhah's two sons had five sons, contributing seven to the sum, and Zilpah's two sons had eleven sons, one daughter (apparently counted here), and two grandsons, making sixteen; therefore, thirty-three plus fourteen plus seven plus sixteen equals seventy.

Genesis 46:26 – 27 starts with the figure of sixty-six (apparently dropping out Er and Onan, since they died in Canaan, as well as deleting Joseph and his two sons, since they were already in Egypt, but adding Dinah so as not to overlook her). To this total of sixty-six are added Joseph, his two sons, and Jacob himself, for a total of seventy. The LXX, however, adds the names of Joseph's three grandsons and two great-grandsons in Genesis 46:20, for a total in 46:27 of seventy-five. Interestingly enough, the LXX version for Exodus 1:5, Acts 7:14, and one Hebrew manuscript from Qumran (Frank M. Cross, Jr., *The Ancient Library of Qumran and Modern Biblical Studies* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1958; rev. ed., Anchor Books, 1961], 137) all have seventy-five as a total here as well. Regardless of which figure is used (seventy or seventy-five), the number is actual, not figurative. Houtman (*Exodus*, 1:66) expresses the commonly held view that seventy expresses the "notion of 'perfection,' 'completeness,' . . . the ideal number of descendants." (See also comments on Ge 46:8 – 27 in this volume.)

6 – 7 With the vocabulary of God's promised blessing of multiplication and increase as given to Adam (Ge 1:28), Noah (8:17; 9:1, 7), Abraham (17:2 – 6; 22:17), Isaac (26:4), and Jacob (28:3, 14; 35:11; 48:4), Moses records that God had been fulfilling his plan during the 430 years that Israel was in Egypt. Verse 7 is unique, for only in this text are the five verbs for growth and increase of the people of Israel used together. Elsewhere, at most only three of these verbs occur together. The author truly wants to emphasize this point.

NOTES

5 כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ יֹצְאֵי יֶרֶךְ־יַעֲקֹב (*kol-nepeš yōṣᵉʾê yerek-yaʿᵃqōb*) is literally, "all the soul [collective singular] of the ones going out of the thigh of Jacob"— the usual expression for physical generation. The solidarity of the group is clear from the collective singular. The word "soul" here means "person."

7 וַיִּשְׁרְצוּ (*wayyišrᵉṣû*, "multiplied," lit., "bred swiftly") is usually used only of the prolific marine life (Ge 1:20) and insects (Ge 7:21).

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2. The First Pogrom (1:8 – 14)

[8]Then a new king, who did not know about Joseph, came to power in Egypt. [9]"Look," he said to his people, "the Israelites have become much too numerous for us. [10]Come, we must deal shrewdly with them or they will become even more numerous and, if war breaks out, will join our enemies, fight against us and leave the country."

[11]So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. [12]But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites [13]and worked them ruthlessly. [14]They made their lives bitter with hard labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their hard labor the Egyptians used them ruthlessly.

COMMENTARY

8 The "new king" who is ignorant of Joseph's contribution to Egypt (rather than "had no personal acquaintance" with him) has been variously identified: the founder of the Hyksos dynasties (so Rea); the founder of the Eighteenth Dynasty who expelled the Hyksos, Amosis I (so Cook); the founder of the Nineteenth Dynasty, Rameses I, or even his son Seti I (so Rawlinson); or the first strong ruler of the Nineteenth Dynasty, Rameses II (so Rylaarsdam). The most logical choice favors the Hyksos king (see the Notes).

9 – 10 Israel is called "a people" (*ʿam*) for the first time in v.9. The situation calls for an extremely delicate balance: Pharaoh needs to maintain the Israelite presence as an economic asset without thereby jeopardizing Egypt's national security.

11 The term "slave masters" is common to both Hebrew and Egyptian. The same official Egyptian name, *ser*, appears on the famous wall painting from the Theban tomb of Rekhmire (Kitchen, 140, n. 17), the overseer of the brick-making slaves during the reign of Thutmose III. The painting shows such overseers armed with heavy whips. Their rank is denoted by the long staff held in their hands and by the Egyptian hieroglyphic determinative of the head and neck of a giraffe. This Egyptian title is found as early as the Sixth Dynasty under Pepi (Cook, 485).

The two storehouse cities the Israelites built were for the storage of provisions and perhaps armaments (cf. 1Ki 9:19; 2Ch 8:4 – 5; 11:5, 11 – 12; 32:28). The location of one of those cities, Pithom (*Per-itm*, "House of [the god] Atum"), in all probability may be equated with Tell er-Retabeh ("Broomhill"), which some equate with Heliopolis (cf. *ZPEB*, 4:803 – 4; the LXX of Ex 1:11 adds to the two storehouse cities, "and On, which is Heliopolis"), or less likely with another site eighty miles east, Tell el-Maskhuta ("Mound of Idols"), both in Wadi Tumilat. The other site, Rameses, has most recently been located at or near Qantir ("Bridge") instead of the more popular but remoter Tanis/Zoan site. (For further details, see "Date of the Exodus" in the Introduction; also J. Bimson, *Redating the Exodus and Conquest* [Sheffield: Univ. of Sheffield Press, 1978], 35 – 48; Hoffmeier, 116 – 21.)

12 – 14 Cassuto notes how lopsided and foolish Pharaoh's challenge was. The king of Egypt said, "They will become even more numerous" (*penyirbeh*, lit., "or he will increase," v.10); but the God of the universe said, "The more they multiplied" (*keìn yirbeh*, lit., "more he multiplied," v.12). The result is that a frightful dread comes over the Egyptians, just as it took hold of Moab in Numbers 22:3. Ironically, in both cases the God-intended instrument for the salvation of both nations (cf. Ge 12:3) becomes instead, through the hardness of human hearts, the source of crippling fear. Thus the Egyptians "made [Israel's] lives bitter" (v.14) — a fact that is later commemorated in the Passover meal, which is eaten "with bitter herbs" (12:8). The emphasis of vv.8 – 14 falls on the "ruthlessness" of the work and servitude imposed on Israel.

NOTES

8 Since Genesis 15:13 had predicted that Abraham's descendants would "be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years," and since the verb וַיָּקָם (*wayyāqom*) + עַל־מִצְרָיִם (*ʿal-miṣrāyim*) means "to rise up against Egypt" (e.g., Dt 19:11; 28:7; Jdg 20:5; 2Sa 18:31; 2Ki 16:7), John Rea, 59 – 61, identifies the "new king" as the Hyksos ruler who arose in Egypt as king around 1730 BC. The Hyksos were foreign invaders who drove the Egyptians south and did not use Egyptian hieroglyphic writing on their scarabs. They, like the Israelites, were Semites. This yields almost three hundred years of bondage (cf. again the four hundred years of Ge 15:13), instead of a brief time under one or more of the pharaohs who came after the Hyksos were expelled around 1575 BC

This suggestion is good and is consistent with biblical data. Jacob's arrival in Egypt with his family is probably not to be equated with the arrival of the Hyksos around 1720 or 1730 BC (as many scholars argue) but is better placed a century and a half earlier, around 1880 BC, if the dates of Exodus 12:40 and 1 Kings 6:1 are to be judged as reliable indicators.

11 שָׂרֵי מִסִּים (*śārê missîm*) means "slave masters" or "taskmasters." The *mas* was the technical name for forced labor, called the "corvée" (cf. 1Ki 5:13 – 18; 9:15 – 22; 12:4). Later (Ex 3:7; 5:6, 10, 13 – 14) Moses uses נֹגְשִׂים (*nōgᵉśîm* , "slave drivers," from the root, "to drive, press").

פַּרְעֹה (*parʿōh*, "Pharaoh") is not a personal name but comes from the Egyptian *pr-ʿo*, which means literally, "great house." During the third millennium BC it meant "royal palace," but it shifted in usage to an epithet for the king and became a royal title during the Eighteenth Dynasty. The use of "Pharaoh" indicates either that we are picking up on the story toward the end of the oppression, which takes us into the Eighteenth Dynasty, or else it is a modernization of the ancient designation of "king" to help those understand who lived in the days of the Eighteenth Dynasty.

13 – 14 בְּפָרֶךְ (*bᵉpārek*, "ruthlessly") is a rare word that comes from a root meaning "to crush, break in pieces." The word may still contain a smack of the free use of the slave master's stick as Israel made bricks and worked in the fields tending royal flocks (Ge 47:6), worked on farms (Dt 11:10), and perhaps, as Josephus suggested (*Ant.* 2.203 [9.1]), dug canals.

3. The Second Pogrom (1:15 – 22)

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15 The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were
Shiphrah and Puah, 16 "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and
observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl,
let her live." 17 The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the
king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. 18 Then the king of
Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this?
Why have you let the boys live?"

19 The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like
Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives
arrive."

20 So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became
even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave
them families of their own.

22 Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: "Every boy that is born
you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live."

COMMENTARY

15 The two midwives are probably representatives of or superintendents over the whole profession. Cook argues that midwives were seldom used by most women, especially those of the poorer classes, and therefore two midwives would be enough. But Rawlinson, 16, counters, “What impression could the monarch expect to make on a population of from one to two millions of souls by engaging the ser vices of two persons only?”

16 The delivery stools were literally “two stones” (dual form), just as the potter’s wheel in Jeremiah 18:3 had two stones. Older commentators (Lange, Bush) contended that the same word in Exodus 7:19 meant a stone watering trough, so that the midwives were advised to kill the male babies when they were laid on these stone troughs to be washed after birth. This suggestion may be safely rejected in the light of consistent Egyptian evidence for the upright position for delivery on a type of birthing stool.

17 – 21 The midwives “feared God” (v.17) more than they feared the king of Egypt. If they are Egyptian in nationality, their God-fearing ways reveal the presence of God’s common grace and the residue of earlier divine revelation that their ancestors shared but gradually left in whole or part (cf. “the fear of God” in Abraham with the Philistines, Ge 20:11; the Amalekites in their savage attack, Dt 25:18; and the wicked in general, Mal 3:5). The midwives are “religious” in that they have respect for life.

But if the midwives are Hebrew women (see Notes), the “fear of God” is then a response of faith, just as Abraham’s act of offering Isaac was a response to God’s command in Genesis 22:8, 12. Even though these women lie to Pharaoh (which the Bible, as is often the case, does not stop to specifically condemn at this point), they are praised for their outright refusal to take infant lives. Their reverence for life reflects a reverence for God. Thus God gives them *bāttîm* (“houses” or “families,” v.21; cf. Ru 4:11;2Sa 7:11 – 12;1Ki 2:24 [NIV,“dynasty”], 33 for this expression). The midwives may also have attempted to avoid answering Pharaoh’s question directly, and therefore they comment on what is true without giving all the details (vv.18 – 19).

22 A single concluding and transitional verse summarizes ch. 1. Pharaoh

needs to command openly by decree what has proved abortive by mere speeches. “All his people” are made agents of this crime in order to nullify the divine work of increased Hebrew children. This clearly parallels Herod’s action at the birth of Christ. Thus the third pogrom begins.

NOTES

15 Whether the midwives were Egyptians or Hebrews depends on the vocalization of לַמְיַלֶּדֹת הָעִבְרִיֹּת (*lamyallᵉdōt hāʿibrîyyōt,* “to the midwives, the Hebrews”). But the Greek translation of Josephus (*Ant.* 2.206 [9.2]), the reference to Exodus 1:15 (which separates the Egyptian midwives from the Hebrew women), and possibly 1:22, which has Pharaoh’s command going to *all* his people (as opposed to a few midwives), argue for the reading, “to the midwives of the Hebrews” (*limʿyallᵉdōt ʔet] hāʿibriyyot*) . The only weight favoring the present vowel pointing of the MT consists in the Semitic names of the midwives, but it must be remembered that the Egyptian maid Hagar (Arab. *hajara,* “forsake”) had a Semitic name as well. Shiphrah and Puah appear to be Semitic and not Egyptian names. There is a *Sp-ra* (“fair one” or “beauty”) in an eighteenth-century BC list of Egyptian slaves, and the Ugaritic word *pgt* (“girl”) may be linked with Puah, meaning “splendid one” or “splendor” (See W. F. Albright, “Northwest-Semitic Names in a List of Egyptian Slaves from the Eighteenth Century,” *JAOS* 74 [1954]: 222 – 33, esp. 229).

Whether “Hebrew” is connected (even if only partially) with the *Habiru* of the third and second millennium BC is still vigorously debated without conclusive results (see Moshe Greenberg, *Ḥab/piru*).

16 הָאָבְנָיִם (*hāʾābenāyim,* “delivery stools”; cf. Egypt. *db.ty*) are pictorially represented in A. Erman, *Die Religion der Ägypter* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1934), 55, and a discussion of the custom appears in W. Spiegelberg, *Ägypten Randglossen* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1904), 19 – 25. In the Egyptian story of the Westcar Papyrus, the goddess Isis places herself in front of the seated woman Red-djedet, who proceeds to deliver triplets, while another goddess stands behind her. Notice also the Egyptian hieroglyphic determinative of the verb *mss* (“to give birth”) with a woman delivering in a sitting position.

17 On the “fear of God” in Genesis 20:11; 22: 8, 12; Exodus 1:17, 21; 18:21, see Hans Walter Wolff ’s discussion in *Vitality of Old Testament Traditions*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and Hans W. Wolff (Atlanta: John Knox, 1976), 70 – 75.

19 חָיוֹת (*ḥāyôt*, “vigorous, robust”) may well be the Egyptian expression ,*ʾnh .t*, a collective used for the speed and ease with which sheep and goats deliver.

22 כָּל־הַבֵּן הַיִלוֹד (*kol-hābbēn hāyyillôd*, “every boy that is born”) seems universal and might also apply to the Egyptians, but the context restricts the reference to Hebrew males. הַיְאֹר (*hāyʾōr*, lit., “the river”), which usually refers to “the Nile” (NIV) in its sixty-six occurrences in the OT, is a common Egyptian name for the Nile (*ʾiwr* or *ʾitrw*) .The sacred name for the Nile in the Pyramid Texts was *ḥpi* (from *ḥp*, “to flow, run”).

Morton Cogan (“A Technical Term for Exposure,” *JNES* 27 [1968]: 133 – 35) argues that תַּשְׁלִיכֻהוּ (*tāšlîkuhû*, lit., “you must throw him”) is better translated, “Every boy that is born you *shall expose* upon the Nile” (see also B. S. Childs, “The Birth of Moses,” *JBL* 84 [1965]: 110 – 18). Cogan finds this sense of abandonment in Psalm 71:9 (parallel to *ʿāzab*, , “to forsake”); Jeremiah 38:6, 9; and Ezekiel 16:5. Moses’ mother has in mind something different from Pharaoh when she “places” her child on the river. Presumably for Pharaoh such exposure would remove an involvement with bloodguilt that drowning would leave. But both senses of “throwing and abandoning” (= exposing) are well attested for this Hebrew verb. It is doubtful that the Egyptian monarch worried about bloodguilt after the pogroms of such enormity have already been attempted, even if they were more secretive in nature.

B. Preparations for Deliverance (2:1 – 4:26)

1. Preparing a Leader (2:1 – 10)

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[1]Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman, [2]and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. When she saw that he was a fine child, she hid him for three months. [3]But when she could hide him no longer, she got a papyrus basket for him and coated it with tar and pitch. Then she placed the child in it and put it among the reeds along the bank of

the Nile. [4]His sister stood at a distance to see what would happen to him.

[5]Then Pharaoh's daughter went down to the Nile to bathe, and her attendants were walking along the river bank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to get it. [6]She opened it and saw the baby. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said.

[7]Then his sister asked Pharaoh's daughter,"Shall I go and get one of the Hebrew women to nurse the baby for you?"

[8]"Yes, go," she answered. And the girl went and got the baby's mother. [9]Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So the woman took the baby and nursed him. [10]When the child grew older, she took him to Pharaoh's daughter and he became her son. She named him Moses, saying, "I drew him out of the water."

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 An unnamed couple from the family of Levi become the parents of Moses. Since Levi's son Kohath was born before the family moved to Egypt (Ge 46:11), where they stayed for 430 years of bondage (Ex 12:40 – 41), and since Moses was eighty years old at the Exodus (7:7), he was born some 350 years after Kohath's time. Hence, if Amram was Kohath's "son" (6:18) and Jochebed was Levi's "daughter" (Nu 26:59), the meaning of these terms must be in the permissible ancient Near Eastern sense of "ancestor" or lineal descendant; otherwise the narrative becomes increasingly awkward. For example, during Moses' lifetime Moses' "grandfather" would be said to have fathered 8,600 males (not counting females), of which 2,750 are between the ages of thirty and fifty years old — all of this up to the time of one year after the Exodus (cf. Nu 3:19, 27 – 28)!

It is best, then, in conformity with usual biblical reckoning and methods of recording genealogies (cf. William Henry Green, "Primaeval Chronology," *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973], 13 – 28), to allow for several gaps in the four generations that spanned the almost four hundred years from Joseph to Moses (cf. *NIV Study Bible* note on 6:20; Gispen, 77, n. 10). Houtman, 270 – 71, claims that it is unlikely that the Hebrew can mean something other than "the

daughter of Levi"; however, he is aware that that will create problems in connection with Exodus 12:40, but he is sure that "it was not the writer's intention to present a complete and harmonious chronological picture." Only by speculating that there is a plurality of writers and sources can one assume such inconsistencies within the text.

Moses is not the firstborn or oldest child, as the story may at first seem to imply; his brother Aaron is three years older and his sister Miriam is a young girl already. The fact that he is a "fine child" (v.2) may relate to his physical appearance (cf. Ge 39:6) as well as to the qualities of his heart (cf.Ac 7:20, *asteios*tō theō, "fair in the sight of God" [NIV mg.]; and Hebrews 11:23, *asteion paidion*, "fair, proper child" [NIV, "no ordinary child"]). Muslim tradition assigns many miracles to the night when Moses was born —statues in the temples of Egypt toppled and Pharaoh had an ominous dream that called for his repentance to God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

When Moses' mother can hide him no longer, she fashions a basketlike boat from papyrus reeds and caulks it with pitch to make it watertight (v.3; see Notes for Egyptian background to these terms). The word "ark, box, chest" is likely borrowed from an Egyptian word (see C. Cohen, "Hebrew *tbh*: Proposed Etymologies," *JANESCU* 4 [1972]: 36 – 51). This little "ark" is "covered with asphalt, bitumen," a rendering that regards this expression as a denominative verb. The effect is one of caulking the improvised vessel so as to make it waterproof. It is said the ark is coated "with tar and pitch," but these two terms form a hendiadys; therefore the two terms should be rendered as the LXX does with the one word: "asphalt."

Many scholars have been impressed by a similar story about another Semite — Sargon of Akkad from the second half of the third millennium BC In this case, his father was unknown and his mother a high priestess, who bore him in secret. He, too, was put on a river, which carried him along in a basket of rushes coated with pitch. He was pulled from the river by Akki, the gardener and drawer of water, who rescued him and raised him as his son (*ANET*, 119). The goddess Ishtar gave Sargon her love; thus he became king. But to argue that the story was borrowed from Sargon and later attached to Moses to give him greater credibility in the light of his later accomplishments (so in part, Beegle, 53) is to impose categories on the text rather than to discover them evidentially. The differences between the two stories are more striking than the similarities. (See

B. Lewis, *The Sargon Legend: A Study of the Akkadian Text and the Tale of the Hero Who was Exposed at Birth* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980], 149ff. Also cf. D. B. Redford, "The Literary Motif of the Exposed Child," *Numen* 14 [1982]: 209 – 28.)

Clearly, Moses' mother has something else in mind besides child abandonment or exposure, for each individual action denotes love and hope for deliverance. The intricate detail is a "beautiful illustration of the connection which should always exist between the diligent use of means and a pious trust in providence. Instead of sitting down in sullen despair, or passive dependence on divine interposition to do all the work, everything is done which can be done by human agency" (Bush, *Exodus*, 1:25).

5 Egyptologists generally (e.g., Montet, 80) are skeptical about such women of rank as Pharaoh's daughter going down to the Nile to bathe; however, the text does not say the royal party went "into" (*b*^{e}) the river (as did Naaman in 2 Kings 5:14) but that they were "at" or "by" (*ʿal*) the river —presumably a branch of the Nile such as the Tanitic, where crocodiles are not usually found. Cook notices that currently crocodiles are seldom found below Elephantine (Aswan) but that in the ancient empire they were found as far north as Memphis. This indicates that the delta was relatively free of their invasions. But even if the women were not there to bathe in the river (a suggestion John Gardiner Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians* [London: J. Murray, 1878], 3:389, defends as being most consistent with actual practice), Strabo, Pliny, and Aelian are quoted by Cook (255) and Rawlinson (1:24) to the effect that the waters of the Nile were regarded as sacred, and such washing was more of an ablution with health-giving and fructifying effects.

6 – 9 The princess discovers the reed basket and opens it to find a beautiful Hebrew baby boy, crying (v.6). Her heart is immediately moved with compassion. Miriam emerges from her hiding place and perhaps acts as though she were just casually passing by (v.7). If her words are not according to the careful plan and instruction of her mother, then her inward prompting must have come from God —not a moment too soon or too late, with not a word too many or too few! Not only is the child returned to his own mother, but also she is paid wages for nursing the child she fears she might never see alive again (v.9). It is during these days that Moses' mother and father have their only opportunity to

teach him all they know about the God of his fathers.

10 "The child grew," and if the phrase is to be compared with the full expression in Genesis 21:8, then we may add "and was weaned" (see Notes). Moses is then brought to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopts him and named him Moses. The name *Mōšeh* ("Moses") is generally considered to be Egyptian in origin, but the attached phrase points to a Hebrew origin: "I drew him out of the water." Nevertheless, since the Egyptian princess is credited with naming him, and since there is an old perfective form of the Egyptian verb *msꜣ* found in such names as Ptahmose, Thutmose, Ahmose, and Ramose meaning "(such and such a god) is born," it is now universally regarded as Egyptian (see J. C. Griffiths, "The Egyptian Derivation of the Name Moses," *JNES* 12 [1953]: 225 – 31).

The Hebrew root "to draw out" (*mšh*) is used no doubt because of the assonance it shares with the Egyptian name. In the explanation that follows his name, it is difficult to determine whether the princess means to give a *reason* for her choice of names, which involves a pun made for her Hebrew audience, or whether she means to declare her right to assign Moses his name since she is the one who pulled him out of the water (see Notes).

NOTES

וַיֵּלֶךְ ... וַיִּקַּח (*wayyēlek*.. . *wayyiqqah*., "married"; lit., "he went . . . and he took") is best rendered by a pluperfect, "he had married," i.e., before Pharaoh's murderous edict. The verb "to go" marks the idea of entering, beginning, or undertaking some action, while the verb "to take" includes in such contexts the concept of getting married (cf. Hos 1:2). Such telescoping of the narrative for its own immediate purpose happens in 2 Samuel 12:24 – 25, where Bathsheba's three children born prior to Solomon are not mentioned (cf. 2Sa 5:14; 1Ch 3:5).

3 The word for "papyrus basket," תֵּבַת גֹּמֶא (*tēbat gōmēʾ*), is used only here and for Noah's ark. *Teìbet* ("basket") may well reflect the Egyptian *tb*, and *gōmēʾ* probably represents the Egyptian *ḳmyt* ("gum, resin") or *ḳm* ("papyrus"). The basket is coated with חֵמָר וּבַזָּפֶת (*ḥēmār ûbazzapet*, "tar and pitch"). The Egyptian words (with metathesis) are *mnḥ* ("pitch") and *sft* ("tar"), the latter being common in Egyptian but only occurring in the OT twice.

סוּף (*sûp*, “reeds”) is most certainly derived from the Egyptian *twf*. The Hebrew word for these tall grasses is the same that occurs in the name of the “Red” or “Reed” Sea. Notice that the *Yam Sup* may indicate as well the saltwater areas of the Gulf of Aqabah in 1 Kings 9:26 (NIV mg.). See the commentary on 13:17 – 18 for more details.

5 “Pharaoh’s daughter” may have been the famous Eighteenth-Dynasty princess and queen Hatshepsut. Eusebius records the tradition that her name was “Merris” (*Praeparatio Evangelica* 9.27). Josephus calls her “Thermuthis” (*Ant.* 2.224 [9.5]); but others claimed her name was “Tharmuth” (*Jub* 47:5), “Bityah,” or “Bithiah” (*b. Meg.* 74, 91; *b. Ber.* 41; cf. 1Ch 4:18, “Pharaoh’s daughter Bithiah”), who married Mered of Judah (cf. *Midrash Rabbah* Ex 2:10).

The princess is escorted by “her attendants,” who stayed on the riverbank to guard her privacy, no doubt, while אֲמָתָהּ (*ʾămātāh*, “her slave girl”) accompanied her into the water. On order by the princess, her personal slave girl went out to fetch the improvised floating cradle for the princess’s inspection.

7 The technical Hebrew term for a “wet nurse” is אִשָּׁה מֵינֶקֶת (*ʾiššâ mêneqet*, lit., “a woman, a nursing one”).

8 Miriam is called הָעַלְמָה (*hāʿalmâ*, “girl”) — the term for “the virgin” of Isaiah 7:14.

10 There is no need to emend the verb וַיִּגְדַּל (*wayyigdal*, “when [the child] grew”) to וַיִּגְמַל (*wayyiggāmal*, , “when he was weaned”). Greenberg (*Exodus*, 42) correctly points out that *wayyigdal* alone can mean that an infant has reached boyhood or even manhood (cf. Ge 25:27; Jdg 13:24; 2Ki 4:18).

Moses should have been called מָשׁוּי (*māšûy*), pronounced *mashuey* (passive participle, “drawn out [of the water]”), if his name were fully to fit the explanation. Instead he was called מֹשֶׁה (*mōšeh*, “One who draws out [of the water]”), almost as though it prophetically points to his future work (cf. Isa 63:11). The name is of Egyptian origin, *ms(w)*, a hypocoristicon from a theophoric name-type meaning “to bear, give birth to, beget.” See J. Griffiths, “The Egyptian

Derivation of the Name Moses," *JNES* 12 (1952): 225 – 31. The name Rameses, or Ramesses, uses the same verb, *ms*, but in form as an active perfect participle (instead of the Egyptian old perfective form as in "Moses"), meaning "Re is he who has borne him."

2. Extending the Time of Preparation (2:11 – 22)

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[11]One day, after Moses had grown up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labor. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people. [12]Glancing this way and that and seeing no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. [13]The next day he went out and saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the one in the wrong, "Why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?"

[14]The man said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us? Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian?" Then Moses was afraid and thought, "What I did must have become known."

[15]When Pharaoh heard of this, he tried to kill Moses, but Moses fl ed from Pharaoh and went to live in Midian, where he sat down by a well. [16]Now a priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came to draw water and fill the troughs to water their father's flock. [17]Some shepherds came along and drove them away, but Moses got up and came to their rescue and watered their flock.

[18]When the girls returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "Why have you returned so early today?"

[19]They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock."

[20]"And where is he?" he asked his daughters. "Why did you leave him? Invite him to have something to eat."

[21]Moses agreed to stay with the man, who gave his daughter Zipporah to Moses in marriage. [22]Zipporah gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom, saying, "I have become an alien in a foreign land."

COMMENTARY

11 – 12 Somewhere along the line Moses becomes aware of his Hebrew descent. When he is forty years old (Ac 7:23; cf. Heb 11:24 – 25; *Jub* 48:1 says he was forty-two), he strikes and kills an Egyptian for beating a fellow Hebrew (v.11). It is his impetuosity that is wrong, not his sense of justice or his defense of the downtrodden. This costs him another forty years of education before he is ready for the task of delivering Israel.

Calvin thought Moses acts by the Spirit of God here, but Augustine was surely correct when he stressed that Moses has no legal authority to do what he did. Moses' own conscience likewise agrees, for he first looks "this way and that" (v.12) and then buries the corpse in the sand. But the very impulse that leads Moses to avenge wrongdoing apart from due process of law is developed to do the work of God when God finishes seasoning him through the experiences of life!

13 – 14 The champion of the oppressed and underdogs goes out the next day — this time to settle a dispute between two of his own people (v.13). But Moses is thoroughly rebuffed and his motives impugned by the one who ought to have been practicing neighborly love (v.14). He disarms Moses by announcing that he knows what Moses did the previous day — he is a murderer, and now he is meddling in someone else's business! Moses surmises that it must have become public information, and he wisely decides to leave Egypt as quickly as possible.

15 – 19 Moses flees to the land of Midian (v.15), in the Arabian Peninsula along the eastern shore of the Gulf of Aqabah. Hebrews 11:27 affirms that "by faith [Moses] left Egypt, not fearing the king's anger"; but that is no real discrepancy with our passage, since the NT writer is referring to his final departure from Egypt at the time of the Exodus (so Bush, *Exodus*, 1:32). Pharaoh's wrath is not so much to avenge the death of an Egyptian as it is to deal with his discovery that Moses is acting as a friend and possible champion of his sworn enemy, the oppressed Israelites. Moses' sole route of safety lies in fleeing Egypt, so he goes to Midian.

In Midian, Moses sees the seven daughters of a Midianite priest named Reuel being harassed and chased from watering their flocks at the troughs by unscrupulous shepherds, but he takes care of that (vv.16 – 17). Since Moses still

has his Egyptian clothing on, they judge him to be an Egyptian (v.19).

20 – 22 The offer of hospitality (v.20) leads to Moses' marriage to Reuel's daughter Zipporah (v.21). Subsequently she gives birth to a son (v.22). Moses betrays his loneliness by naming his son Gershom; for he explained, "I have become an alien in a foreign land" (v.22; see Notes).

NOTES

11 וַיַּרְא בְּסִבְלֹתָם (*wayyarʾ bᵉsiblōtām*, lit., "he watched [them] at their hard labor") is to "look on" with sympathy and real emotional involvement — the opposite of turning one's back on someone. Compare 1:11, "forced labor," where the same Hebrew word, *sᵉbalâ*, occurs.

11 – 12 Moses spies an Egyptian מַכֶּה (*makkeh*, "beating") a Hebrew; so he נִךְ (*wayyak* "killed") him. Both verbs are from the same root in Hebrew, *nkh* ("to beat, smite, kill"). Bush (*Exodus*, 1:30) quotes a law from Diodorus Siculus that obligated an Egyptian to take just such action if he saw a fellow creature being violently assaulted. But was this not a daily occurrence in the slave camps of Egypt? Bush's further appeal to Moses' divine inner call is offered as a parallel to that of Phinehas (Nu 25:7, 13), Ehud (Jdg 3:21), and Gideon (Jdg 6:27), as well as proof of why a temporary concealment of the corpse is necessary, since his call has not yet been made public. But the cases are not parallel since no call or specific order precedes Moses' act. Simply stated, minds capable of great virtue are subject to great vice when that God-given asset is turned into a liability through haste, pride, or stubbornness.

14 שַׂר וְשֹׁפֵט (*śar uʷšōpēṭ*, "ruler and judge") is a figure of speech called hendiadys, in which both words form a single idea. The point of the question is close to the modern snarl, "Who died and left *you*, boss?" Likewise, in Ugaritic the words *zbl tpt* ("prince-judge") are used as a hendiadys for the ruling person.

15 Midian derives its name from the fourth son of Abraham by his second wife, Keturah (Ge 25:2). It is not improbable that many of the main doctrines taught by Abraham were retained and transmitted — even if with a mixture of

error — to his descendants. Josephus (*Ant.* 2.257 [11.1]) locates Midian on the coast of the Gulf of Aqabah. The older geographer Ptolemy (6.7.27) and Eusebius (*Onomasticon*, 136.31) mention a Madiana or Modiana that may be modern el-Bed, twenty-six miles east of the Gulf of Aqabah.

16 The כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן (*kōhēn midyān*, "priest of Midian"), or with the Chaldean,"prince of Midian," may have held the same dual office as the prince-king of Salem in Genesis 14 (see comments on Ex 18). Notice that 2 Sam uel 8:18 called David's sons "priests" (*kōhᵉnîm*; NIV mg.), but 1 Chronicles 18:17 makes them "chief officials" (*rᵉšōnîm*).

17 וַיְגָרְשׁוּם (*waygārᵉšûm*, "[they] drove *them* away") has a masculine plural suffix, as does "*their* flock," while "[he] came to *their* rescue" (emphasis mine in all cases) has a feminine plural suffix; therefore, the text indicates that the daughters are accompanied by menservants who work under their direction. Cassuto disagrees; for him the feminine *nun* ending is used simply to avoid confusion with the *nun paragogicum*.

18 רְעוּאֵל (*rᵉʿûʾēl*, "Reuel") means "friend or shepherd of God" (cf. 2:18; 3:1; Nu 10:29; Jdg 4:11, NIV mg.). W. F. Albright first proposed that "Reuel" is actually a clan name (Nu 10:29 and LXX of Ge 25:3; as an Edomite clan in Ge 36:4 and 1Ch 1:35, 37); then he suggests that Exodus 2:18 be emended to read, "And they came to [Jethro, son of] Reuel, their father" ("Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew Tradition," *CBQ* 25 [1963]: 4 – 9). But no MSS support such an emendation.

A better solution is to note that dual names for the same person are well known from South Arabic sources. Exodus 2:21 and 3:1 treat Reuel as though he were the same person as Jethro. Josephus argued that Reuel was his proper name and Jethro his official designation (cf. *Ant.* 2.258 [11.2]). In the LXX his name is spelled Raguel because the Greek cannot represent the Hebrew guttural ע (ʿ), but it is the identical Hebrew spelling in all instances.

21 צִפֹּרָה (*ṣippōrâ*, "Zipporah") means "bird" (feminine), or as we would say, Moses married "Lady Bird."

22 גֵּרְשֹׁם (*gēršōm*, "Gershom") means "stranger [*gēr*] there [*šām*] ". If *šōm* is an adjective

from the root *šmm* (“to be desolate”), then it means “lonely stranger.” The Vulgate and LXX borrow a text from 18:4 and add it here for the sake of completeness: “And she conceived again and gave birth to a second son. And he called his name Eliezer, saying, ‘For the God of my fathers is my helper, and he has delivered me from the hand of Pharaoh’ ” (cf. Ac 7:29).

3. Preparing a People for Deliverance (2:23 – 25)

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[23]During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. [24]God heard their groaning and he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. [25]So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

COMMENTARY

23 The king of Egypt who died is probably the same one who sought Moses’ life for murdering an Egyptian (2:15; 4:19). The only pharaohs who ruled for more than thirty years in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties were Thutmose III (1483 – 1450 BC), Amenhotep III (1410 – 1372 BC), Haremhab (1349 – 1315 BC), and Rameses II (1301 – 1234 BC). Thutmose III is probably the pharaoh of the oppression, who gains control after the death of his aunt-stepmother-mother-in-law (cf. Rea, 63 – 64, for arguments disqualifying the others).

Misery finally finds a voice, and so the pain of Israel’s bodily senses precede her recognition of the poverty of her spiritual condition. Thus God prepares the audience and people who will be delivered while he prepares the deliverer himself. No longer does Egypt symbolize delightful foods, wealth, and fatness; instead, it now means slave masters, forced labor, and bondage. So Israel cries out to God.

24 – 25 God is pleased to respond to even those first lisps of faith, but he is

also moved by his own word that he promised to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (e.g., Ge 17:7, 19; 35:11 – 12). It is a remembrance that is more than a mental act; it also includes a performance of God's word, just as it did in Genesis 8:1 and 1 Sam uel 1:19. In four consecutive verbs, the divine action is charted: God hears, God remembers, God looks (= considers), and God knows (= is concerned).

NOTES

23 בַּיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם (*bayyāmîm hārabbîm hāhēm*, "During that long period") is literally, "in those many days." It is not necessary to conclude with Rawlinson (1:36, 50) that only Rameses II's sixty-seven-year reign fits Moses' eighty years of life to this point, for both Thutmose III's thirty-four-year reign and Amenhotep III's thirty-eight-year reign qualify.

25 וַיֵּדַע (*wayyēdaʿ*, "he was concerned about [them]") is literally, "he knew." It stands without an object (so Ge 18:21) and means "to take note of with a view to caring." The LXX reverses the meaning in an obviously harmonistic reading by making *yd*ʿ a Niphal with a passive idea of, "he [God] made himself known to them," so as to fit the continuation of the narrative in 6:2 – 8.

4. Calling a Deliverer (3:1 – 10)

OVERVIEW

While Moses is actively engaged at one task, God calls him to another — the very one Moses felt himself so eminently qualified for forty years previously when he struck out with such impetuosity against the abuses of power he witnessed in Egypt. The Hebrew text begins in such a matter of fact way (using the Hebrew copulative *waw*), as though to say, "Here now is Moses, shepherding his father-in-law's flock of sheep and goats in Horeb." In this way the writer resumes his account of the events in Moses' life after the interlude of 2:23 – 25. He has now joined the daughters of Jethro (or has the full responsibilities placed

on his shoulders) as a shepherd of his father-in-law's flock.

One day Moses drives the flock "beyond" (some try to translate it, "to the west of "; others, "far side of ") his usual grazing area in order to seek pasture for them. He goes so far that he comes to "Horeb, the mountain of God." This designation does not mean that the mountain is a well-known cultic spot; rather, the term is used proleptically of that spot that will become well known to both Moses and his listeners (readers) by the time the narrative is written. At the time of Moses' call, Moses is unaware of the mountain's later significance. The mountain takes on this characterization after it becomes the place where God reveals himself to his leader.

All sense of routine and dullness suddenly yield to an appearance (Niphal form of the verb "to see") of "the angel of the LORD." Many biblical scholars isolate the various sources for this call in an atomistic way by dividing "mountain of God" from "Horeb" and by separating "to appear," the Niphal form of the verb, from its active form, "to see." But as Jonathan Magonet ("The Bush That Never Burnt: Narrative Techniques in Exodus 3 and 6," *HeyJ* 16 [1975]: 304 – 11) points out, this method overlooks the integrative function of such features in the text. The two different forms of the verb reflect the experience of Moses: from an objective point of view, God *appears* (Niphal) as Yahweh (= LORD), but from a subjective perspective, Moses *sees* (Qal) God (= Elohim). Only coldly dictated literary conventions freeze each alleged source (usually said to be J and E) to a one-sided perspective when the narrative claims to be two-sided.

Magonet relates a second organizing principle in this section in the use of narrative pegs to serve as introductions for three stereotyped phrases that each occur twice, viz., "The God of Abraham . . . of Isaac . . . of Jacob" (vv.6, 15); "a land flowing with milk and honey" (vv.8, 17); and "the home/land of the Canaanites, Hittites . . ." (vv.8, 17). Rather than viewing these repetitions as evidences for some alleged literary sources, they function as devices for emphasis and as a way of combining terms that elaborate one another to help fix the meaning. Thus "my people" of v.7 becomes "Israelites" in v.9, with both incorporated in v.10.

The identity of this messenger has always been a basis for debate: Is this

messenger always the same celestial being, or is he none other than the *Logos* himself, as the early church favored? A study of other texts where "angel/messenger of Yahweh" appears leads to the conclusion that Yahweh and his messenger share many of the same characteristics and ascriptions of worth and worship. Some may wish to safeguard the distance between Yahweh and his messenger. But that is unnecessary if this messenger is a preincarnate appearance of the second person of the Trinity. Rabbinic tradition, of course, opts for a separation between the messenger and Yahweh; therefore, the rabbis gave this messenger the name of Zagnugael (Zagzagel) or, according to other traditions, Michael or Gabriel (so Houtman, 1:337).

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[1]Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest
of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to
Horeb, the mountain of God. [2]There the angel of the LORD appeared to
him in flames of fi re from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush
was on fire it did not burn up. [3]So Moses thought, "I will go over and see
this strange sight — why the bush does not burn up."

[4]When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him
from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

And Moses said, "Here I am."

[5]"Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the
place where you are standing is holy ground." [6]Then he said,"I am the God
of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of
Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

[7]The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt.
I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am
concerned about their suffering. [8]So I have come down to rescue them from
the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good
and spacious land, a land fl owing with milk and honey — the home of the
Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. [9]And now
the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the
Egyptians are oppressing them. [10]So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh
to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 The valley of er-Raha, two miles long and one-third to two-thirds of a mile wide, lies between the three summits traditionally identified with the "mountain of God" (so named, again, in retrospect because God appeared there and revealed himself to Moses). There the Lord appears in "*the* bush" (emphasis mine; the definite article probably being used here because Moses had referred to the bush so frequently in oral references before writing it down).

The Lord appears "in the form of [see Notes] a flame of fire." What takes place is a "strange sight" (v.3) to Moses; therefore, to explain what happened here as a temporary mirage of reflected sunlight on some red leaves or a campfire of some Bedouin or even the phenomenon of Saint Elmo's fire is to substitute *our* experience for Moses' forty years in that area and his estimate that it is indeed unusual. The burning bush is not consumed; that is the miracle. Notice how miracle is used here, as it so typically is in Scripture, to accredit God's message (or messenger). Miracles are not circus "side shows" intended to entertain; rather, they accredit the word of God given to his special messengers.

The significance of God's work is not necessarily that the bush pictures the despised and oppressed people of God (Keil and Delitzsch, 1:438, appeal to Jdg 9:15, where the thornbush represents God's humiliated people vis-à-vis the lofty trees), for it is "from within a/the bush" (vv.2, 4) itself that the Lord calls to Moses. Instead, its meaning is to be found in the fact that God chooses the small and the despised burning bush as his medium of revelation, and he waits to see how sensitive Moses is toward the insignificant and small things of life before he invests him with larger tasks.

Indeed, the God of glory could have set the whole of Sinai aglow with light and fire, had he wished, but he wants to use this bush for a lesson to make an impression on Moses. The fire, then, symbolizes God's powerful, consuming, and preserving presence (cf. 19:18; 24:17; Jdg 13:20; 2Ch 7:1 – 3; Eze 1:4 – 28; Da 7:9 – 10; Heb 12:29).When Moses goes over to inspect this unusual sight, God issues his call by repeating Moses' name to express the urgency of the message (cf. 1Sa 3:10 for this same type of urgent summons).

5 – 6 God's presence demands a holistic preparation of the one who aspires to enter his presence. To teach Moses this lesson, God sets up admittedly arbitrary

boundaries — “Do not come any closer” — and commands that he should also remove his sandals (v.5).This is to prevent him from rashly intruding into God’s presence and to teach him that God is separate and distinct from mortal human beings (cf. 19:10 – 13; 2Pe 1:18). Because God is present, what has been ordinary becomes “holy ground” and consequently “set apart” for a distinct use. The place where sheep and goats traveled just a short time ago is transformed into “holy ground” by God’s presence. As Bush observes (*Exodus*, 1:44), it is not an intrinsic holiness because of the nature of the ground itself but relative only to and based on the divine appointment that remains true as long as God ordains it so. This also is the first occurrence of the noun “holy” in Scripture (cf. Ge 2:3 for the verbal form).

When the condition for meeting God is satisfied, the Lord reveals himself. He identifies himself as the “God of your father” (v.6; collective singular — see Ge 26:24; 31:5, 42, 53; 43:23; 46:1, 3; 49:25; 50:17; Ex 15:2; 18:4 for a similar formula). Of course, the plural form “God of your fathers” appears more frequently (cf. also Stephen’s use of the plural in Acts 7:32), but the collective singular also has a special point in that it is through the *one* man of promise (ultimately, the Messiah him-self) that the *many* are to receive God’s blessing. Thus God assures Moses that the God of his father has not forsaken his repeated word of promise Ge 15:1 – 21; 26:2 – 5; 35:1 – 12) or his people, and he will certainly be with Moses in the commission he is about to receive. (On Moses’ fear of “looking” at God, see comment on 24:9 – 10.)

7 – 8 The anthropomorphisms (i.e., the descriptions of God’s actions and attributes in words usually associated with humankind) in vv.7 – 8 of God’s “seeing,” “hearing,” “knowing” (= “be concerned about”), and “coming down” become graphic ways to describe divine realities for which no description exists except for partially analogous situations in the human realm. But these do not imply that God has corporeal and spatial limitations; rather, he is a living person who can and does follow the stream of human events and who can and does at times directly intervene in human affairs.

Three times v.8 mentions the land. The often-repeated promise to the patriarchs is about to become a reality after awaiting fulfillment for over half a millennium! Two facts describe the land: it is a good and a spacious land (cf. Dt 8:7 – 9) — good because it is a “land flowing with milk and honey,” and spacious because six nations (or in some parallel lists, ten; see Notes) are living

there; but Israel will possess it all. It is a “land flowing with milk and honey” in that the sheep and goats give the milk while the nectar of the vine and the work of the bees add more delectables, and those in abundance. This phrase takes on proverbial status (3:17; 13:5; 33:3; Nu 13:27; Dt 26:9, 15; 31:20; Jer 11:5; 32:22; Eze 20:6) and, in short, meant a land of plenty.

9 – 10 The call of Moses comes to a double conclusion with the phrase, “And/so now” (see Notes). Verse 9 essentially repeats v.7 by summarizing the preceding speech and by restating the grounds on which this divine call is issued: viz., Israel’s present need and God’s solution. Verse 10, however, is the bottom line to the whole incident of the burning bush; it is the formal commissioning of Moses as God’s emissary to lead Israel out of Egypt.

NOTES

1 חֹרֵב (*ḥōrēb*, “Horeb”) is a Semitic name that means “desert, desolation” and an alternate name for Sinai (of unknown meaning). Usually it is identified with Jebel el-Musa (7,363 feet, on the southeast side of the valley), less often with Jebel es-Safsaf (6,540 feet, on the northwest side), or Jebel Katarin (about 9,000 feet, on the southwest side). Compare Mount Hermon, with its alternate name of Sirion in Deuteronomy 3:9; Psalm 29:6.

חוֹתֵנוֹ (*ḥōṯᵉnô*, “father-in-law”) has the Arabic root *ḥatana* (“to circumcise”); in Akkadian the nominal form is *hatanu*, which means “relative by marriage” (*CAD*, 6:148). T. C. Mitchell (“The Meaning of the Noun *ḤTN* in the Old Testament,” *VT* 19 [1969]: 93 – 112) concludes that the OT term *ḥtn* is likewise a kinship term that means something like “relation by marriage.” Notice, however, that when the Masoretes wished to distinguish between *ḥōtēn* (“father-in-law”) and *ḥōtēn* (“brother-in-law”), they did so by the vowels.

Moses leads Jethro’s sheep to the אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר (*ʾaḥar hammidbār*, “far side of the desert”). Since the orientation of the Midianites was to face east, the *ʾaḥar* (lit., “back”) is the west.

2 The easy movement from the title מַלְאַךְ יהוה (*malʾak yhwh*, “messenger [or ‘angel’]

of the LORD") to "LORD" and Elohim in v.4 shows that this person is a real being who is at once *identified* with God yet also is sent by him and is therefore distinct from the Father (cf. Young, 3 – 6).

לַבַּת (*labbat*) in בְּלַבַּת־אֵשׁ (*bᵉlabbat-ʾēš*, "in flames of fire") is probably a contracted form of לַהֲבַת (*lahbat*, "flame"; cf. Ps 29:7). The ב (*b*) of *bᵉlabbat* may be, as Childs (*Exodus*, 50) suggests, the *beth essentiae* (GKC, sec. 119.i; BDB, 88, s.v. ב , 7). This construction is then exactly like Exodus 6:3 and is translated, "the LORD appeared to him *as/in the form* of flames of fire" (italics marking the force of the *beth essentiae*).

2 – 3 The difficulty in translating בָּעֵר ... לֹא־יִבְעַר (*bāʿēr ... lōʾ-yibʿar*, "was on fire . . . does not burn up") captures the shift of the tenses and the separate nuances of meaning for the same verb. The Hebrew text has both an active participle and the Hebrew imperfect form of the verb along with two slightly different meanings of the same verb, *bʿr* ("to burn, blaze, burn up"). David Noel Freedman ("The Burning Bush," *Bib* 50 [1969]: 245 – 46) argued that the *lo*, is emphatic and not negative; thus v.3 would read:"Why indeed the bush continues to burn," even though the concluding words of v.2, "(but) the bush does not burn up," are not repeated but understood.

6 Beginning with Albrecht Alt ("The God of the Fathers," *Essays in Old Testament History and Religion*, tr. R. A. Wilson [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968]), scholars have alleged that each patriarch originally had his own separate clan god. For a refutation of this thesis, see E. J. Young, "The God of the Fathers," *WTJ* 3 (1940 – 41): 25 – 40;Thomas E. McComiskey, "The Religion of the Patriarchs," *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton (Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1974), 195 – 206; Kaiser, 58, 60.

7 Israel is no longer a family, but a people and a nation — one so internally linked to Yahweh that he calls them עַמִּי (*ʿammî*, "my people").

8 Such anthropomorphic terminology as וָאֵרֵד (*wāʾēred*, "So I have come down"; cf. Ge 11:5, 7; 18:21) should not be used to build a case for an alleged ancient view of a triple-decked universe. It is only a figurative way of communicating the reality of the intervention of God in the stream of human affairs.

לְהַצִּילוֹ (*lᵉhaṣṣîlô*, “to rescue them”) is literally the collective singular, “to rescue him.” This interchange of the one and the many is so frequent in Scripture that it usually calls for little notice. But it does explain why Israel faces little difficulty understanding how one individual (e.g., “seed” or “servant”) can embody the whole group and that the God of their fathers is that man of promise who ultimately points to the Messiah but who also embodies all believers of all ages in that same collective singular.

The list of the Canaanite nations varies from five names in Numbers 13:29 to the fullest list of ten in Genesis 15:19 – 21 (see also Ge 10:15 – 17; Dt 7:1; Jos 3:10; 11:3; 24:11).The name “Canaanite” (the eponymous son of Ham, Ge 10:6) seems to overlap with the name Amorite, “Westerner” (see Ge 10:15 – 16, where Canaan’s sons include the Amorites; also cf. Ge 15:18 – 21 with 15:16). “Perizzite” appears to mean “villager” (*pᵉrāzî*, “unwalled village, dweller in an unwalled place”; cf. Hyatt, 74). The “Hittites” (cf. Ge 23:10 – 20; 2Sa 11 – 12) do not seem to be the Indo-Europeans of present-day Turkey; perhaps they are immigrants from the Old Hittite Empire (Cole, 67). The “Hivites” may be a corruption of the name Horite, for Genesis 36:2 speaks of “Zibeon the Hivite” but calls his father a “Horite” in 36:20 (a switch to *ḥry* from *ḥwy*; Hyatt, 74). The “Jebusites” controlled Jerusalem prior to David’s capture of that city (2Sa 5:6 – 8) and are probably Hurrians, as Araunah’s name shows (see 2Sa 24:18 – 24).

9 – 10 וְעַתָּה (*uᵉʿattâ*, “And/so now”) appears twice, its repetition being a common device in biblical narrative; accordingly Magonet (“The Bush,” 309 [see Overview, above]) points to Genesis 44:30 – 33;

1 Sam uel 24:21 – 22; 2 Sam uel 7:28 – 29; 1 Kings 8:25 – 26. Greenberg (*Exodus*, 73 – 74) has an extensive comparison of this feature with 2 Samuel 7:28 – 29, showing that the first “and now” restates the previous grounds, while the second “and now” gives the conclusion that will call for some response.

5. Answering Inadequate Objections (3:11 – 4:17)

a. Who am I to go to Pharaoh? (3:11 – 12)

OVERVIEW

Moses utters five protests against accepting God's commission. This first one reflects the great change that has come over him after forty sobering years of reflection and development. He was only too eager to offer himself as a self-styled deliverer prior to this extended training in Midian, but at this point Moses presents a different problem to the Lord. He is now timid, unsure of himself, and shrinks back from any self-assertiveness that his divine commission demands of him.

It is strange that Moses does not raise another, larger issue — the feasibility of organizing, equipping, and sustaining such a massive escape. Apparently that problem has been settled by the burning bush, for to preserve one entity (the bush) is no greater than to preserve another (Israel). But Moses has serious doubts about his own qualifications. Once again God is about to use a person who is keenly aware of his own defects and who seeks no advantage or position over others.

Moses' response to God's orders to go to Pharaoh and to bring "my people" out of Egypt has occasioned a lot of speculation as to why he declines so high a calling. While there may be a note of modesty and humility in his declination, yet the essence of his question, "Who am I?" is an implicit refusal. Certainly he is more guarded and less impulsive than he was forty years earlier, but it is doubtful that he exhibits traces of being emotionally and personally hurt by the refusal of the Israelites to approve of his intervention on their behalf some forty years prior to this call. Comparisons with other statements of unworthiness in the OT (such as Gideon's youthfulness, Jdg 6:15; King Saul's meager family background, 1Sa 9:21; Solomon's youthfulness, 1 Ki 3:7; or Jeremiah's lack of eloquence, Jer 1:6) do not prove helpful in this case. Exodus 3:11 simply gives no reason why Moses protests. It is only the subsequent context that allows us to deduce that he simply does not wish to undertake such a task.

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[11]But Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

[12]And God said, "I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt,

you will worship God on this mountain."

COMMENTARY

11 Moses repeats, as already noted, the twofold divine commission of v.10 that he should personally go to Pharaoh and that he should bring Israel out of Egypt. Then he asks, in the familiar idiom of the Near East that stresses the magnitude of the inequity between the agent and the mission, "Who am I?" (cf. 6:12; 1Sa 18:18; Isa 6:5; Jer 1:6; 2Co 2:16). He feels unequal to the task, but he does not explain why, nor does he offer an excuse: God simply has the wrong man for the job!

12 God's response to Moses' alleged inadequacy is twofold: he will personally accompany him (which expands and strengthens "I have come down" in v.8), and he will give him a sign. As God promised fourteen times to be "with" (*ʾet* or *ʿim*; see Notes) the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, he now assures Moses that he will be actively present as he continues to fulfill his promised word of blessing. He gives this assurance in a form that soon becomes proverbial, a first-person fixed formula of self-introduction: "I will be with you" (cf. Ge 26:3, 24; 31:3; later Ex 4:12, 15; Dt 31:23; Jos 1:5; 3:7; Jdg 6:16).

If God has assured Moses that the divine personal presence will accompany him in this assignment, it should render Moses' objection devoid of merit. Who Moses is is not at all as important as who God is. The contrasts cannot be sharper or more telling than the divine provision found in this promise, which incidentally is found around one hundred times in the OT.

This "sign" (see Notes) given to Moses has been variously interpreted. Some refer "this" back to the burning bush or to the preceding clause, while the majority of interpreters understand "this" to look forward to the following clause. Others such as Noth (42) argue that something has dropped out of the text. We agree with the majority, for the "sign" here is confirmatory and appeals to faith rather than to immediate evidence or to the presence of the miraculous.

This sign is not the same as Gideon's in Judges 6:17, for Gideon requested the

sign whereas Moses does not. Therefore, Moses' sign belongs in the same class as signs about the future: 1 Samuel 2:34 (a sign that Eli's sons will die in the near future); 10:2 (a sign that Saul will meet two men), 3 (or later, three men), and 5 (or even a band of prophets); 2 Kings 19:29 (the sign of future crop production); Isaiah 7:14 (the sign of the future birth of Messiah); and Jeremiah 44:29 – 30 (the sign that Pharaoh Hophra will shortly be delivered into the hands of his enemies). Thus while God gives "signs" as "proofs" to the people (Ex 4:1 – 9), interestingly enough he gives no such "signs" to Moses himself but asks for faith and trust in his word and promises to be present. (This parallels our Lord's promise to his disciples.)

There is also more than a hint in this sign that the mission of Moses goes beyond a mere deliverance of a nation from bondage; Israel is to be set free to "worship" God. Divine worship calls for more than sacrifice; it is basically a calling on God's name in adoration and petition (as the patriarchs already understood; Keil and Delitzsch, 441). In fact, Israel will soon enter into covenant with God on this very mountain (ch. 24) and present their gifts and offerings as part of their worship in order to build the tabernacle (36:1 – 7; Nu 7).

NOTE

12 In the statement אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ (*ʾehyeh ʿimmāk*, "I will be with you"), *ʾehyeh* is the first-person form of the name of Yahweh (= LORD) rather than its familiar third-person form, Yahweh (see next section for fuller treatment). In effect, then, God pledges his very person and being as signified by his name; he will be dynamically and powerfully present for Moses and thus for all the people. See the excellent study on "with" by Horst D. Preuss, "*ʾet; ʿim*," *TDOT*, 1:449 – 63, esp. 454 – 58. On וְזֶה לְּךָ הָאוֹת (*uzzeh lkā hāʾôt*, lit., "This [will be] to you a sign"), see the discussion by F. J. Helfmeyer, "*ʾôt*," *TDOT*, 1:183 – 85 especially.

The verbal root of תַּעַבְדוּן (*taʿabdûn* [GK 6268], "You [pl.] will worship," lit., "serve") does not mean primarily "to sacrifice" as in the Vulgate and Luther. It is much broader and involves all Israel. As Greenberg observes (*Exodus*, 77 – 78), it is "an adumbration of the great theophany to come," a stating of a totally new goal of "serving God" instead of Pharaoh.

b. What if they ask what your name is? (3:13 – 22)

OVERVIEW

Moses has another objection to God's call. He is worried that the people will ask him this difficult question: "What is there in the name of God that will help us in circumstances like these?" Patiently and without rebuke, God provides him first with the answer (vv.14 – 15) and then with two speeches — one for the elders of Israel (vv.16 – 18a) and the other for Pharaoh (v.18b).

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13 Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them,
'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his
name?' Then what shall I tell them?"

14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to
the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.' "

15 God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of
your fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob
— has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to
be remembered from generation to generation.

16 "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD, the
God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — appeared
to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done
to you in Egypt. 17 And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery
in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites,
Hivites and Jebusites — a land flowing with milk and honey.'

18 "The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to
go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the
Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the desert to
offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.' 19 But I know that the king of Egypt
will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. 20 So I will stretch
out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will
perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

21 "And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people,
so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. 22 Every woman is to
ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver

and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."

COMMENTARY

13 Moses does not anticipate being asked, "By what name is this deity called?" Rather, he fears that if he announces that the God of their fathers, the patriarchs, has sent him to them, they will bluntly ask him, "What is his name?" The point of their question is not the same as, "Who is this God?" That question would be answered, "He is called Yahweh." But as Buber, 48 – 55, has argued, the Hebrew *mâ* ("What?") seeks the significance, character, quality, and interpretation contained in the name; therefore, *mâ* seeks to discover what the name of Yahweh (= LORD) is in reputation and action. In fact, the name "Yahweh" was already known to Moses and Israel, for Genesis gives abundant evidence to support the presence of that name already in patriarchal times; what they need to know was, "What does that name *mean* or *signify* in circumstances such as we are in?"

14 – 15 Elohim gives *two* answers (one in v.14, one in v.15) to the problem posed by Moses, not three as some scholars allege (who then go on to determine which of the three, if any, is the original reply in the account, e.g., Noth, 93; Hyatt, 77). The structure of v.14 is aptly described by Cassuto (37 – 38): (1) it gives the exact quotation that answers the question and (2) it gives an explanation of the inner meaning of the quotation. Both phrases are introduced with "And he said . . . and he said" — a frequent Hebraism already seen in Genesis. The second answer in v.15 (notice: "And God *also* said" [emphasis mine]) builds on the basic explanation of the meaning of Yahweh's name in v.14 and links that name with previous and all future generations (see Childs, *Exodus*, 61 – 62, for all previous proposals on the relationship of vv.13 – 15). Childs concludes (61), "Few verses in the entire Old Testament have evoked such heated controversy and such widely divergent interpretation."

If little agreement exists on the inner relationship of vv.13 – 15, still less exists on the meaning of "I AM." Perhaps the most natural explanation that does fullest justice to the fact that this name is connected with some form of the verb *hāyâ* ("to be") and to its own context, given our present canonical shape of the text, is to

see it as expressing the nature, character, and essence of the promise in v.12:“I will be with you” (*ʾehyeh ʿimmak*).

What, then, is his name? The answer is: “[My name in its inner significance is] I am, for I am/will be [present].” The answer is (1) not an evasion (“I am called what I am called”), (2) not a reluctance to disclose his name (as though he said, “My name really is not the point!”), (3) not a cutting short of Moses (as though to say, “One thing at a time, I’m in charge here!”), and (4) not a primitive shout of invocation (“O He!”).

Each of these attempts to explain the meaning violates some explicit aspect of the context. As to (1) and (2), instead of evading Moses or being reluctant, God takes the initiative in supplying his name (v.14a), its meaning (v.14b), and its past and future connections (v.15). As to (3), instead of interrupting Moses, God patiently responds directly to four repeated objections Moses makes. And as to (4), instead of the shout originating with humans, it emanates from an unfolding of the character and being of God. (On the form and etymology of the name “Yahweh,” see the Notes.)

The formula used in v.14 is the Hebrew syntactical construction known as *idem per idem*, in which the same root with the same sense is repeated both in the principal clause and also in what is here the dependent relative clause. Some parallel Hebrew expressions are: “Send, I pray, by the hand of whom you will send” (cf. 4:13, KJV);“Bake what you want to bake,” and “Boil what you want to boil” (16:23); “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy,” and “I will show compassion on whom I will have compassion” (33:19); “They went wherever they went” (cf. 1Sa 23:13, KJV); “I will go where I will go” (cf. 2Sa 15:20, KJV); “Sojourn where you can sojourn” (cf. 2Ki 8:1, KJV). While it may sound to our Western ears that God is deliberately trying to avoid disclosing his name, the context shows that he is actually doing the opposite; therefore the formula is positive.

Often this construction is used to express totality, intensity, or emphasis to the form so highlighted by repetition, as in 33:19, viz., “I certainly am he who is gracious and shows mercy” (as contrasted with prima facie impressions of arbitrariness; cf. also Eze 12:25; 36:20 [cf. the NASB]); therefore, the formula of self-introduction in Exodus 3:14a (along with its explanation in v.14b) means, “I

am truly he who exists and who will be dynamically present then and there in the situation to which I am sending you."

This was no new God to Israel, but the same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who is sending Moses. God's name is Yahweh (= LORD in the KJV, NIV, NASB, et al.). For the first time God uses the standard third-person form of the verb "to be" with the famous four consonants YHWH, instead of the first-person form of , *ʾehyeh* as previously in vv.12 – 14. This is to be God's "name" forever — a name denoting God's person, character, authority, power, and reputation (see *ZPEB*, 4:360 – 70).

So linked is the person of Yahweh with this name that both are often used interchangeably (e.g., Dt 28:58; Ps 18:49). The name is to be a "memorial" (*zēker*, GK 2352); that is, it was to be for the act of uttering the mighty deeds of God throughout all generations. (There are twenty-eight instances of this concept in the OT; see Cassuto, 39.) Strictly speaking the noun used here (though the NIV translates it as a verb to fit an English idiom — "to be remembered") is not a simple "recollection" or "remembrance." Brevard S. Childs (*Memory and Tradition in Israel* [Lon-don: SCM, 1962], 70 – 73) demonstrates that the parallelism of Psalm 6:5 ("No one remembers you [*zikrekā*] when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?") shows that the problem with the dead is not their inability to remember Yahweh but their inability to share in the praise of Yahweh (cf. Ps 135:13; Hos 12:5). So here in v.15 the joy of Israel's worship will be to share in the praise of the essence, power, and significance of "I am he who is, was, and will be [present]" when I say I will be there.

16 – 18a The "elders of Israel" (v.16) are the heads of various families (6:14 – 15, 25; 12:21; Nu 2) or tribes, each having one or more to preside over or rule. Moses is to deliver God's message to this body of men and to get them to accompany him when he goes to Pharaoh. The message comes in the name of Yahweh, who is the same as the God of the patriarchs. It began with a repetition of the words used by Joseph on his deathbed: literally, "I have surely visited you" (NIV, "I have watched over you"), and "I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt" (v.17). Joseph prophesied the very deliverance announced by Moses (see Ge 50:24).Thus the repetition here is equivalent to saying that the Lord will complete and fulfill what he began to do as spoken by Joseph (Rawlinson, 1:57).

In fact, the very word used for misery (*ʿani*) in v.17 was used in the original promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:13 that the Egyptians would "mistreat [*ʿinnu*]" them for four hundred years (Bush, 1:52). Moses is assured of a sympathetic hearing from the elders, for the hearts of human beings are in the hands of God.

18b – 20 Moses and the elders are instructed first to make only a moderate and limited request of Pharaoh for a temporary leave of three days' absence in order to offer sacrifices to Yahweh their God (v.18b). This is not an example of a partial truth or a ruse and an attempt to deceive Pharaoh. The appeal to Psalm 18:26 —"To the crooked [Rashi glosses 'with Pharaoh'] you [God] show yourself shrewd" — as a policy statement (Greenberg, *Exodus*, 85) misses the point that a divine judgment never comes until Pharaoh has repeatedly rejected all divine aids to acquiesce to God's plan. The matter is as Augustine and that fifteenth-century Spanish exegete Abarbanel put it: God deliberately grades his requests of Pharaoh from easier (a three-day journey with an understood obligation to return) to more difficult (the total release of the enslaved people) in order to give Pharaoh every possible aid in making an admittedly most difficult political and economic decision.

Had Pharaoh complied, Israel could not have exceeded the bounds of this permission but would have then presented another, presumably more difficult, request. Nevertheless, God certainly knows this king of Egypt well enough to know what his reactions will be. Accordingly, he warns Moses just as the principle of Amos 3:7 states: "Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan [*sod*] to his servants the prophets." Not even "a mighty hand" (v.19) — in this case the plagues (see Notes on 4:21 on "wonders") — will budge his obduracy and recalcitrance. Thereby Moses is cautioned not to misconstrue any rejection he receives as a sign that God has not called him or that God is not with him — all to no avail; for Moses later raises those very complaints (5:22 – 23).

21 – 22 God promised Abram that after Israel had served for four hundred years, they would "come out with great possessions" (Ge 15:14). Thus the early chapters of Exodus systematically record the fulfillment of one patriarchal promise after another to make the connection beyond any trivial objection. The so-called spoiling of the Egyptians is to be explained by a simple request (refer to the comments and Notes on 11:1 – 2; cf. 12:35 and Ps 105:37; *šāʾal* means "to ask," not "to borrow") and by granting divine favor to the Israelites' request.

God commands Israel to live by this same principle of providing a present to the slave who is to be released every seven years (Dt 15:13; Greenberg [*Exodus*, 86] notes the striking similarity in wording). Charges of fraud, deception, deceit, and villainy against Israel are all misplaced. The fact is that the ignominy of their slavery is reversed in this sign of the recovery of their personhood — why even the children are to be decked in the jewels and the gifts of clothing!

NOTES

13 מָה (*mâ*, "What?") is to be distinguished from מִי (*mî*, "Who?"). The latter asks only the identity, ancestry, or some external feature of a person (cf. Ge 33:8; Ex 3:11; 2Ch 2:6; Mic 1:5), but *mâ* inquires into the character, quality, or essence of a person or event (cf. Ge 31:26 [*meh*]; 32:27; Ex 13:14; Jos 4:21; Pr 30:4;

Zec 1:9; 5:6; see Motyer, 17 – 24).

15 The pronunciation "Jehovah" for יְהוָה (*yehōwâ*, "the LORD") was provided by the Masoretes, who read the vowels of אֲדֹנָי (*ʾădōnāy* ("my Lord") into יהוה (*yhwh*). The more accurate pronunciation is "Yahweh," based on its derivation from the verb הָיָה (*hāyâ*, "to be," v.14) and on analogy with such Amorite names as *Yahwi-ila*,*Yawi-Dagan*.

On the etymology and meaning of the name Yahweh, there is almost no agreement. The bibliography in the last century alone would fill a whole book, and there seems to be no end in sight. There are several major schools of opinion.

(1) The name Yahweh has an Egyptian etymology coming from two Egyptian words: *Yah* ("moon") and *we3* ("one"). This view, however, is now totally rejected. (For this and much of what follows, see Roland de Vaux, "Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH," *Proclamation and Presence: Essays in Honour of G. H. Davies* [London: SCM, 1970], 48 – 75.) A more tenable Egyptian parallel is *p3 nty wn.w.f* ("The one who is who he is"; cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, "He Is Who He Is," *Ber* 23 [1974]: 27 – 28).

(2) It has an Arabic etymology from *Ya-huwa* (“O He!”), a dervish cry (Buber, 49 – 50); but this name would then emanate from men.

(3) It is a Northwest Semitic root of *hwy* (“to be”) in such names as *Yawi-ila*. De Vaux (“Proclamation and Presence”), however, points out that the common root meaning “to be” in Amorite and Ugaritic is *kwn*.

(4) It is a Hebrew verbal root from *hāwāy* (“to fall”) and thus has the substantive meaning “destruction”; hence Yahweh is the god of storms and thunder. But Exodus does not appeal to this verb. Furthermore, it is only used once in the OT (Job 37:6).

(5) Yahweh derives from the Hebrew pronoun *hûʾ* (“he”), as in Isaiah 43:10: “I am he,” and Psalm 102:27[28]: “You remain the same [*hûʾ*]” (S. Mowinckel, “The Name of the God of Moses,” *HUCA* 32 [1961]: 121 – 33; Hans Kosmala, “The Name of God [YHWH and HU’],” *ASTI* 2 [1965]: 103 – 6).

(6) It is a causative Hebrew verbal root of a *yaqtil/yiqṭol* type, meaning “he causes to be” or “he is the Creator,” but this solution requires a correction in the explanation given in 3:14 in addition to having some philological problems, such as distinguishing between the basic and causative forms of verbs with a weak third radical.

The most likely etymology and meaning for the name Yahweh is that it is the imperfect form of the root *hwh/hyh*, meaning “he is/will be.” The grammatical problem of moving from a first person *ʾehyeh* to the third person of *hāyâ* (whose present vocalization has been modified as a result of the habit of refraining from pronouncing the ineffable name of God, lest one swear inadvertently) may be more apparent than real because (1) the demands of the sentence structure necessitate switching from the first to third person in the context, and (2) the initial *aleph* can interchange with an initial *yod*. Gordon (“He Is,” *Ber,* 27 – 28) gives these illustrations of this interchange: Ugaritic *aḥd* and *yḥd*; Ugaritic *ytn*, which equals Hebrew *ʾitnn* (“gift”), or even within Ugaritic, where *aṣḥ* and *yṣḥ* both mean “he shouts.” (Also, see Young, 15 – 23, for a case for seeing God’s aseity, i.e., his being rather than his activism and dynamism, in the name, “I am.”)

18 The plural suffix on נִקְרָה עָלֵינוּ (*niqrâ ʿālênû*, “he [God] has met with us [Moses

and the elders]") again witnesses to Israel's concept of collective or corporate solidarity — but not corporate personality! Moses alone met God at the burning bush; but since Moses is the new leader of the people, God has thereby met with them also. Some versions read *qr'* ("call") instead of *qrh* ("to meet") and thus avoid the difficulty treated above.

כְּלֵי־כֶסֶף וּכְלֵי זָהָב (*kĕlê-kesep ûkĕlê zāhāb*, "articles of silver and gold") appears in all three texts of Exodus (here; 11:2; 12:35), but Psalm 105:37 drops the *kĕlê* ("vessels" or "articles") prefix. The women did not request such objects of value as weapons, armor, cattle, or food supplies for the house, table, or future sacrifices, but only jewels and clothes. Therefore, *kĕlê* should not be translated as a third group of things, viz., "vessels." See the Notes on 11:1.

שִׂמְלֹת (*śimālōt*, "clothing") does not refer to festive garments but to daily apparel (as in 22:26; Dt 22:5; Jos 7:6; so G.W. Coats, "Despoiling the Egyptians," *VT* 18 [1968]: 452).

וְנִצַּלְתֶּם (*niṣṣaltem*, "you will plunder"), the Piel form of the verb *nṣl* (cf. 12:36), does not mean or suggest the ideas of stealing, taking away secretly, or purloining private property that belongs to another. As in 2 Chronicles 20:25 (where it is combined with another verb and rendered "take away"), it means to plunder, but not by fraud, deceit, or cunning devices.

E. W. Hengstenberg ("The Alleged Purloining. . . ," in *The Genuineness of the Pentateuch* [trans. J. E. Ryland; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1847], 2:417 – 32) has one of the best surveys of the charges and answers to this problem. *Nṣl*, he argues, often means taking away by force but never by fraud. This military metaphor is used to describe the generous gifts of Egyptian jewels and clothing to the Israelites. Since the articles are "asked for" and not loaned (as is so frequently insisted because of the influence of the bad translations in a day when Hebrew was unknown), and since Israel does so on specific orders from God, who will shortly affirm, "You shall not steal" (20:15), the spoiling or plundering of the Egyptians involves no deception, lying, stealing, or appeal to higher laws with special (albeit temporary) exemptions. The text is too clear to allow for any of these false alternatives (so Hengstenberg).

c. What if they will not believe me? (4:1 – 9)

OVERVIEW

As far as we know, God had not appeared to any human being in over four hundred years. Therefore, Moses feels he has to raise yet another objection to the Lord's commission if he is to announce a claim. It should have been enough for Moses to have had the divine assurance of 3:18 — "The elders of Israel will listen to you" — but Moses wants to play the "what-if game." Graciously, God puts into Moses' hands three signs to be used as credentials with the Israelites.

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[1]Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"

[2]Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

[3]The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground."

Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. [4]Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. [5]"This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob — has appeared to you."

[6]Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was leprous, like snow.

[7]"Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.

[8]Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. [9]But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."

COMMENTARY

1 Moses does not flatly contradict God's assurance in 3:17 as though he says, "Look, they will not believe me or listen to me." Both the Hebrew *wᵉhēn* ("what if ") and the LXX *ean* ("if ") make this a hypothetical situation, not an absolute affirmative (Bush, 1:55, points to a similar use of *hēn* in Jer 3:1). In other words, Moses is by no means a shining model of faith and trust in God, but it is unfair to charge him with being blunt and dictatorial.

The expression "refuse to believe" brings us to one of the key words in this section of the text: the Hiphil of *ʾāman*, "to believe, trust" (which appears fifty-one times in the OT, while its Niphal form appears forty-five times in the OT; GK 586). It occurs five times in this section (see E. Pfeiffer, "Glaube im Alten Testament," *ZAW* 71 [1959]: 151 – 64). To "believe" is both an acceptance of a fact, a message, or the import of a sign, as well as the confidence that results from a relationship (162 – 64). Even more significant is the fact that this verb occurs with the Hebrew inseparable preposition b^e twenty-four times in the OT (e.g., Ex 14:31), which means "to put one's trust or belief *in* [Yahweh or the one Yahweh has sent, such as his envoy Moses]." It should be noted how the word "to believe" is used in 4:1, 8 – 9 with the Hebrew verb *šāmaʿ*, "to listen, heed, obey."

2 – 5 *The first sign*. God's prophets were accredited by "signs and wonders" (cf. Dt 13:1 – 3) with the sole purpose of validating the messenger and the message — that both were truly from God. Accordingly, Moses is given a "sign" to perform "so that [*lᵉmaʿan*] they may believe that the LORD . . . has appeared to you" (v.5). There is to be no hint of the theatrical or circus mentality; this is to be no stunt or caper aimed at entertainment or building a personal following. The principle behind the miracles is to operate just as it did for the Zarephathite woman when Elijah raised her son from the dead in 1 Kings 17:24: "Now I know that you are a man of God [= prophet] and that the word of the LORD [spoken] from your mouth is the truth."

Moses needs first to observe that the staff in his hand is ordinary and unspectacular (see the Notes). But when it is thrown on the ground as God commands, it becomes a snake. While some may attempt to make this snake into something else, the fact that Moses flees from it surely points to the fact that Moses regards it as nothing less than a real viper. It is perhaps too much to

connect this snake *directly* with either the uraeus (or cobra, so Cook, 265) worn on the headdress of Pharaoh (as though Moses has, so to speak, Egypt's king by the tail) or with the serpent of Genesis 3:1 (so Keil and Delitzsch, 448), i.e., Satan and his henchman who exercise evil and brutality.

However, the side reference can hardly have escaped anyone of that day. Moses calls the "serpent" *nāhāš* in this passage, in Genesis 3:14, and in Exodus 7:15; but in 7:9 – 10, when Aaron performs this same miracle before Pharaoh, the staff becomes a *tannîn* (cf. v.12, however). *Tannîn* was probably an Israelite nickname for Egypt and its king (Dt 32:33; Ps 74:13; Eze 29:3):"you great monster" (perhaps as represented by the crocodile). As though to underscore its supernatural nature, Moses is instructed to grasp the serpent by its tail to further prove the divine source of this miracle; for one would normally pick up a serpent by the neck.

6 – 7 *The second sign*. The Hebrew word for leprosy covered a number of assorted diseases, much as our word "cancer" currently does. Actually, leprosy, or Hansen's disease, was known in antiquity. But leprosy in the Bible apparently also covers cases of psoriasis, vitiligo, ringworm, syphilis, mildew, and the rot — all affecting garments and houses as well as people in some cases (Beegle, 78 – 79; E. V. Hulse, "The Nature of Biblical 'Leprosy' and the Use of Alternative Medical Terms in Modern Translations of the Bible," *PEQ* 107 [1975]: 87 – 105; J. G. Andersen, "Leprosy in Translations of the Bible," *BT* 31 [1988]: 207 – 12).

Which particular form is involved here is uncertain, but the condition of the skin is such that its color resembles snow. Any small or ordinary skin annoyance would hardly be of any "sign" value for Moses to show to the people. It must pose a greater threat to the life and health of Moses if the instantaneous cure is also to reflect the greatness and majesty of God's power. The significance of this power to take away the health of the body and then to restore it again so that the affected part is "like the rest of his flesh" (*kibśārô*) is to warn Pharaoh that this God who has sent Moses has the power to inflict or to save what he will with just a word or a gesture from his ambassador.

8 – 9 *The third sign*.The Lord next seizes the initiative by using in vv.8 – 9 almost identical terms as those used by Moses in v.1: "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign or . . . these two signs." What is not

being heeded in each case is literally “the voice” (*qôl*) of these two signs (v.8 [2x], 9 [the English cannot smoothly include this in the translation]). But their “voices” will leave Israel just as accountable as the “voice” of the words of Moses (v.1). No wonder Scripture teaches that there is a natural revelation in the day, night, heavens, and things on the earth (Ps 19:1 – 6; Ro 1:19 – 25). Israel is to be confronted by God through the “voice” of his word and the “voice” of his miracles. This indicates that there will be an appropriate significance that will attach itself to each sign.

In this third sign Moses is to take some water *from* the river (the first plague will later be performed *in* the Nile) and turn it into blood. The Nile (see Notes on 1:22), which flows with the blood of innocent Hebrew victims, will itself witness to its involuntary carnage with this miracle. Will the point of the “sign” be wasted on any Hebrew — or Egyptian? As Abel’s blood cried out from the ground, so will cry out the blood of the infants whose lives have been demanded by Pharaoh (1:22). Egypt’s mighty god, the Nile, will be destroyed by the power of the Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Nile River, deified by the Egyptians, is no match for the power of God’s servant Moses. In this way God shows his hand and hints at what is in store for any — even Pharaoh himself — who choose to take a recalcitrant stand against Yahweh.

NOTES

1 וְהֵן לֹא (*wᵉhēn lōʾ*, “What if [they do] not”) is echoed by God in vv.8 – 9 as אִם לֹא (*ʾim-lōʾ*, “if [they do] not”), thus verifying the stance taken in the commentary on v.1. The text does not say whether these signs are actually demanded by the people, but Moses and Aaron do show them in v.30. The first sign is also performed before Pharaoh in 7:8 – 13.

2 מַזֶּה “what?”), from מָה זֶּה “What is this?”), is perhaps deliberately used as a wordplay on מַטֶּה (*maṭṭeh*, “staff ”). This staff must have been Moses’ shepherding crook (cf. v.17; Ge 38:18; Ps 23:4; Mic 7:14), even though the Egyptians had an aversion to the occupation (Ge 46:34). However, the parallelism of Isaiah 10:24 and 26 shows that the “staff ” Moses uses to bring the plagues has more than passing similarities to the “rod” of affliction used by the Egyptian slave masters. In Exodus 4:20 it is called “the staff of God,” and in 7:9 it belongs to Aaron.

This is no basis for dividing the narrative into a J tradition (shepherd's staff in Moses' hand), an alleged E source (the miraculous "staff of God"), and a P document (the priestly use of the staff by Aaron); these three references only differentiate the ultimate source of its power as being from God and its authorized users as Moses and Aaron. Thus by Semitic usage it may be said to belong to all three without always stopping to distinguish between primary and secondary causes and users.

5 Some believe this sentence is incomplete since the verse begins with לְמַעַן (*lᵉmaʿan*), literally, "that [they may believe]" (Bush, 1:57). But Cassuto, 47, correctly argues that this verse continues the Lord's words from v.4, while the intervening words in v.4 ("So Moses reached out . . .") describe Moses' action during the time God is still speaking.

The root for יַאֲמִינוּ (*yaᵃmînû*, "that they may believe"; GK 586) appears to be thoroughly Hebrew and as yet unattested in related Semitic languages (*TDOT*, 1:292)! The Hiphil form with *lᵉ*(Ex 4:1, 8 [2x], 9) means "to have confidence in a messenger, to believe a message," and is always connected with *lōʾ* ("not"; *TDOT*, 1:302).Verse 5 uses the verb with *kî* ("so that"), and this usage seems closest to Abraham's believing in the word about the Man of Promise to come (Ge 15:5 – 6) or the Ninevites' believing God (Jnh 3:5), i.e., the word about God preached by Jonah. Thus belief may center on God's word or God's works of signs and wonders (cf. 14:31; Nu 14:11; Ps 106:12).

Later, in 14:31; 19:9, *heᵃmîn* appears with *bᵉ*("in") with the meaning of "to put trust *in*." In this sense it is "an endorsement of man's character, not just some of his statements" (Gordon Wenham, *Faith in the Old Testament* [Leicester, Eng.: Theological Students Fellowship, 1976], 3).

8 tao אוֹת (*ʾōt*, "sign") is used as an authenticator of the call of God to Moses (cf. Gideon, Jdg 6:17; Saul, 1Sa 10:1, 7, 9; possibly Rahab, Jos 2:12, 18). In 3:12 the sign was a corroboration and a promise to Moses; here it is to be a basis for trust and belief from the people (see *TDOT*, 1:167 – 88).

8 – 9 יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקֹל (*yišmᵉʿû lᵉqōl*, lit., "[if] they will listen to ['pay attention to'] your

voice”), used here with *lᵉqōl* (cf. *bᵉqōl* in v.1), makes plain that just as Moses’ “voice” in v.1 is a sign to be believed, so the three miracles likewise have “voices” that also speak to the people if they will hear them. Bush, 1:358, argues that “voice” in this context is equivalent to a “meaning, drift, purport”; thus it is the significance of the sign that cries out to the people for a believing and affirming response.

REFLECTION

Moses cannot be certain exactly how his fellow Hebrews in Egypt will respond to him, but he stalls for time in this section. This he does by posing certain nuances to what he has already been told — all of which exhibit a certain lack of confidence in God. But how gracious God is in responding to questions human beings may consider to be real and legitimate roadblocks to faith, even though there is enough basis for action in God’s word alone! Similarly, Jesus in essence said, “Believe me for my word’s sake or [for the more tough-minded who must see, feel, and touch in order to believe] believe me for my work’s sake” (cf. Jn 14:10 – 11).

d. What about my slow tongue? (4:10 – 12)

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[10]Moses said to the LORD, “O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

[11]The LORD said to him, “Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD? [12]Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

COMMENTARY

10 “O Lord,” begins Moses with yet another objection, thereby adding a note of deprecation and supplication: “I have never been eloquent [lit., ‘a man of words’].” This type of phrase recalls Job 11:2 (“talker”; lit., “a man of lips”); Job

22:8 (“a powerful man”; lit., “a man of arm”); Ps 140:11 (“slanderer”; lit., “a man of tongue”). Then in a truly ancient Near Eastern phrase, Moses added (lit.), “not since yesterday and not since the third day,” which adds up to “neither yesterday or any day before”— or simply “never before” (NIV,“neither in the past nor since”).

Not even the experience at the burning bush has remedied this problem, as Moses observes in a backhanded reproach aimed at Almighty God (“since you have spoken to your servant”). Moses sums it all up: he is “slow of speech and tongue” (lit., “heavy/slow of mouth and heavy/slow of tongue”). Apparently the translators of the LXX thought Moses had a speech defect, for there the phrase is rendered, “with a stuttering voice and a slow tongue.” But the Vulgate’s metaphorical interpretation seems to be closer to the truth: “I am not quick-witted and [I am] slow of speech.” This can hardly imply that Moses had a speech impediment or that he was a stammerer, for Stephen declared that Moses was “powerful in speech and action” (Ac 7:22).

Thus Moses’ complaint is not of defective articulation but about his inability to take command of Hebrew and Egyptian (cf. Eze 3:5, where “heavy of tongue” means difficulty with a foreign language) with a ready and copious supply of words and thoughts to beat back all objections from his brothers and Pharaoh — though he does quite well with God! The Egyptian “Tale of the Eloquent Peasant” underscores the importance of eloquence in Egyptian culture.

11 – 12 Surprisingly, God again answers Moses —this time with a question (v.11) that takes on the proverbial status of a wisdom saying to be repeated in Israel later on (Ps 94:9; Childs, 78, recalls such use of wisdom sayings in the prophets’ employment of disputational speech). The gifts of speech, sight, and hearing are from the same Lord who is sending this hesitant leader. While God is not to be blamed for directly creating any defects, yet the wise providence in allowing these deprivations as well as divine goodness in bestowing their ordinary functions mirrors God’s ability to meet any emergency Moses may have suggested. So God announces, “I will help you speak [lit., ‘I will be with you,’ adding ‘with your mouth’; cf. Jer 1:9; Mt 10:19 – 20; Lk 21:14 – 15] and will teach you what to say.”

NOTES

10 גַּם מִתְּמוֹל גַּם מִשִּׁלְשֹׁם גַּם מֵאָז (*gam mitt'môl gam miššilšōm gam mē'āz*) is a Hebraism that literally means, "Also from/since yesterday, also from/since the third day, also from/since [you spoke . . .]" (see Bush, 2:139), which the NIV smoothly renders, "neither in the past nor since."

11 The verbs translated "gives" and "makes" in this verse are from the same Hebrew verb שִׂים (*śîm*), which in its root meaning means "to place, put."

12 On "Now," see Notes on 3:9 – 10. Enough evidence is again in hand for Moses to come to a conclusion. וְהוֹרֵיתִיךְ (*w'hôrêtîkā*, "I will teach you") is related to the noun *torah* ("law") and means "to instruct, point and show [the way]."

e. Why can you not find someone else? (4:13 – 17)

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[13]But Moses said, "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

[14]Then the LORD's anger burned against Moses and he said, "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and his heart will be glad when he sees you. [15]You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. [16]He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. [17]But take this staff in your hand so you can perform miraculous signs with it."

COMMENTARY

13 – 14a Moses' groundless opposition angers God (v.14a). Moses can think of no more good objections, for God has met every one point by point. So God's unwilling servant reveals the true nature of his heart; literally he says, "Send, I beg you, by the hand [of whom] you will send," which is another delightful Hebraism for "choose anyone but me!" (NIV, "please send someone else," v.13).

14b – 17 Nevertheless, God mercifully decides still to use this reluctant servant but also send his brother, Aaron, to supply any deficiency Moses may have felt. However, Moses will have to pay a price for his intransigence: Aaron will receive the honor of leading the priesthood. At least that appears to be the only reason for including this reference to "the Levite" (v.14b) in the divine announcement — it is a hint about things to come in the future service of Aaron and his sons (cf. 1Ch 23:13). There is a risk in declining the call of God; it may be a forfeiture of divine blessing even though there is grace and mercy for the obstinate (so Bush, 1:60).

Once more the omniscience of God is seen in that Aaron is "already on his way to meet [Moses]," having begun at the special prompting of God (v.27) — as perfect a blend of divine sovereignty and human freedom as we will see in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Whether Aaron is coming with the news that the king who has sought Moses' life is dead (2:15) or for some other reason is not known.

The arrangement is that Moses is (lit.) "to become [see Notes] God" to Aaron, and Aaron is to become Moses' mouth (or "prophet," according to 7:1). Nothing defines more accurately the intimate relationship between God and his prophet than 4:16 and 7:1. There are to be no more excuses or discussions: "You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth" (v.15). Further, God will teach both of them ("you" is plural) what they are to do. As for action and deeds, it will be the humble staff in Moses' hand that God will use to perform the miracles he has already begun to speak about (3:20) and to show to Moses (4:2 – 8).

NOTES

13 Hebrew often uses the word יָד (*yād,* "hand") when it wishes to stress instrumentality or agency. Here the phrase "send someone else" is literally, "by the hand of [whom] you will send." (Cf. 9:35: "The LORD had said through [lit., 'spoken by the hand of '] Moses"; 2 Kings 17:13: "The LORD warned Israel and Judah through [lit., 'by the hand of '] all his prophets.")

15 וְאָנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ וְעִם פִּיהוּ (*wᵉʾānōkîʾehyeh ʿim-pîkā wᵉʿim pîhû,* "I will help both of you speak") is literally, "I, I will be with your mouth and with his mouth." The

emphatic form “I” and the *ʾehyeh* strongly suggest the presence and meaning of the Lord’s name (cf. Notes on 3:12, 15).

16 “As if” attempts to bring into English the Hebrew verb הָיָה (*hāyâ,* “to be”) followed by the preposition לְ (*l*), which in most cases is best rendered “to become” (so argues Young, 19). The LXX and Vulgate soften the last phrase of v.16: “you shall be to him in things pertaining to God” — the very phraseology used in Hebrews 5:1 for the high priest: “Every high priest is selected from among men .. . in matters related to God.”

6. Preparing a Leader's Family (4:18 – 26)

[18]Then Moses went back to Jethro his father-in-law and said to him, "Let me go back to my own people in Egypt to see if any of them are still alive."

Jethro said, "Go, and I wish you well."

[19]Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, "Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead." [20]So Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

[21]The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go. [22]Then say to Pharaoh, 'This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son, [23]and I told you, "Let my son go, so he may worship me." But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son.' "

[24]At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. [25]But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said. [26]So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)

COMMENTARY

18 After the burning bush episode, Moses leaves the region of Sinai and goes to Midian to ask Jethro for permission to return to Egypt. Even God's call does not erase the need for human courtesy and respect for one's father-in-law. Interestingly, Moses does not seem to have shared the real reason for his desire to return to Egypt. Whether he is motivated by modesty, as the medieval Jewish commentators explained, or male reluctance to talk about spiritual things with other men, as Calvin would have it, is outside the information we possess. The reason Moses gives is "to see if any of [my own people] are still alive," i.e., "to know how they are getting along." (See Cassuto, 53, on a similar expression used by Joseph in Ge 45:3: "Is my father still living?" i.e., "How is his health?"

after Joseph has just been told that his father is still alive.) So Jethro grants Moses permission to go and wishes him well.

19 – 20 This short section informs us that Moses' decision to return to Egypt took place in Midian, not in Sinai where God appeared to him, and that Moses made that decision before he heard that the pharaoh who sought his life had already died. Therefore, in spite of the various improbable attempts to reject or relocate these verses, an English pluperfect solves the problem best: "Now the LORD *had* said to Moses" (v.19, emphasis mine). It also follows that none of his previous objections to God's call were motivated by fear for his personal safety. The recent news may have influenced him to decide to take along his wife, Zipporah, and their two sons.

Until now only one son, Gershom, has been mentioned (2:22). Eliezer, though unmentioned in this text, has probably also been born (18:4); thus the plural is correct here (see Notes on v.20). Moses' family is not mentioned again until Jethro's visit with Moses and the Israelites encampment at Sinai (ch. 18). The fact that Moses "had sent away his wife . . . and her two sons" (18:2 – 3) does not necessarily mean that they failed to witness the exodus from Egypt. More probably Moses urged his wife, after they returned to Sinai with the delivered nation, to take her two sons and go down to Midian to tell her father everything God had done (see comment on 18:1). After this report Jethro followed his daughter and grandchildren back to the mountain of God, where he rejoiced to see all that the Lord had done through his son-in-law.

Moses now takes the "staff of God" (v.20). What was once ordinary becomes extraordinary by virtue of its use in the service of God. So equipped, Moses prepares to return to Egypt.

21 – 23 By way of summary, the Lord rehearses the key features of his previous directives to Moses: (1) you will perform miracles before Pharaoh; (2) Pharaoh will harden his heart and not release the people; (3) you are to inform him that since Israel is "my firstborn son," the Israelites must be set free so that they might worship me; and (4) Pharaoh's refusal will lead to the death of his firstborn son.

The expression, "I will harden [Pharaoh's] heart so that he will not let the

people go," is used here for the first time. In all there are ten places where "hardening" of Pharaoh is ascribed to God (4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17); but it must be stated just as firmly that Pharaoh hardens his own heart in another ten passages (7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35; 13:15). Thus the hardening is as much Pharaoh's own act as it is the work of God. Even more significant is the fact that Pharaoh alone is the agent of the hardening in the first sign and in the first five plagues. Not until the sixth plague, as Keil and Delitzsch, 1:453 – 55, carefully point out, is it stated that God actually moves in and hardens Pharaoh's heart (9:12), as the warning to Moses in Midian indicates (v.21).

The announcement that Israel is God's "son," yes, even his "firstborn" (v.22), may have stunned Pharaoh, for he was accustomed to regarding himself alone as the "son of the gods." But for a whole people to be a "son" of the deity is a little surprising. Once again the collective singular for all God's seed is evident (see comments on 3:6 and Notes on 1:5; 3:18; cf. Hos 11:1; Mt 2:15). Added to this filial relationship is the declaration that Israel is God's "firstborn" (*bᵉkôr*; GK 1147), which does not mean "first" in chronological order, because Jacob (renamed Israel) was actually born *after* his twin, Esau. Here God meant "first in rank," firstborn by way of *preeminence* with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of a "firstborn." Thus, what had previously rested on natural rights of primogeniture now rests on grace.

With all of this goes the privilege given by God to the seed of Abraham, viz., that by means of this "firstborn" all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Accordingly, God declares David and each of his sons in the line of Messiah to be "my firstborn" (Ps 89:26 – 27; also cf. Jer 31:9); and later Christ himself is called the "firstborn" (Ro 8:29; Col 1:15, 18; Heb 1:6). Revelation 1:5 and especially Hebrews 12:23 include all believers in God's "firstborn" (*prōtotokoi*; GK *4758*). Israel is to be set free, for they are sons of God, the Lord who graciously adopted them as a special inheritance and set them apart from the nations to be the instrument for bringing blessing to all the nations of the earth. (See Keil and Delitzsch, 1:457 – 58, on the distinction between sonship and election.)

The penalty Pharaoh will ultimately pay for his refusal to acknowledge Israel as Yahweh's son and firstborn will be aimed at his own firstborn. Just as 3:12 included an adumbration of Moses' return to Sinai, so vv.21 – 23 intend to show the future work of God beginning with the "wonders" of the plagues and ending

climactically with a threat to Pharaoh's firstborn. The change in person between v.22 and v.23 ("Then [*you*] say . . . and I told you") is remarkable and probably due to the fact that in v.22 we are being given the first and earliest words that Moses is to use as the signs begin. In v.23, however, Moses will address Pharaoh more directly after it is clear that his obduracy is fixed and unchangeable and that no number of divine miracles or amount of prophetic pleading will persuade him to let God's people go.

24 – 26 Because of its brevity, the abruptness of its introduction, the enigmatic nature of some of its cryptic expressions, and the difficulty of establishing exact antecedents for several of its personal pronouns, this paragraph has continued to baffle interpreters. The place to begin to solve these problems is with the explanation given in v.26b. Childs, 95 – 101, has convincingly argued that the adverb אז ("at that time") is nowhere in the OT used to introduce etiological material (from the Greek word *aitia*, "cause," denoting an attempt to explain why certain things function or mean what they do); therefore, most contemporary critical explanations are missing the writer's intention for including this narrative at this point. Nor is v.26b a tautology or merely an older variant and alternative version for the final words of v.25; J. DeGroot ("The Story of the Bloody Husband," *OtSt* 2 [1943]: 13 – 14) points to a similar double ending in 1 Sam uel 4:21 and 4:22. Verse 26b explains that this whole episode — what Zipporah does, what she says, and on whom she operates — refers to the rite of circumcision.

But what is the link with the context in which this paragraph is now located? It cannot be Pharaoh's seeking Moses' of life (v.19) and the Lord's doing the same in v.24 (cf. Cassuto, 59); nor is it to be found in the identical verbs "met" with different subjects in vv.24 and 27. It must rather revolve around Pharaoh's "son," his "firstborn" (v.23), and Moses' "son," *perhaps* his "firstborn" (v.22), along with the fact that all Israel is God's son and firstborn (v.22; cf. Hans Kosmala, "The 'Bloody Husband,' " *VT* 12 [1962]: 22).

With the two textual clues, the rite of circumcision as the explanation of the whole episode, and "my firstborn son" as the connection between the sections, these verses yield this explanation. The Lord attacks Moses as he is en route to accomplish the mission of God in Egypt. The nature of this nearly fatal experience is not known to us; therefore, it does not figure in the interpretation. That Moses is the object of the divine action is clear from the fact that the

otherwise unspecified son in v.25 must be identified as belonging to someone other than Moses. The sudden introduction of Zipporah's action leads us to believe that she instinctively connects her husband's peril (a malady so great that it leaves only her hands free to act, for presumably his are not able to help) with their failure to circumcise their son. This she immediately proceeds to do. But her words of reproach — "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me" — indicate that the root of the problem is in her revulsion and disgust with this rite of circumcision.

The narrative is included at this point, then, to demonstrate that there is an additional factor in the preparation of God's commissioned servant: the preparation of his family. In Genesis 17:10 – 14 God had commanded Abraham to circumcise every male on the eighth day as a sign of the covenant; any uncircumcised male was to be cut off from his people, for he had broken God's covenant. In the present case, however, the father is suffering for his refusal to circumcise his son.

It can only be a matter of conjecture to decide: Which son is this? How long has Moses been married during his forty-year stay in Midian? When is their eldest son, Gershom, born? Or does this episode refer to the newly born Eliezer? In any case, for one small neglect, apparently out of deference for his wife's wishes, or perhaps to keep peace in the home, Moses almost forfeits his opportunity to serve God and wastes eighty years of preparation and training!

To further underscore this connection between Moses' grave condition and the circumcision of his son, Zipporah takes the excised foreskin and touches Moses' feet. (This need not be, as many commentators argue, a euphemism for his genitals, for this is not a puberty rite.) The Lord lets Moses go, and the grip of death is lifted.

NOTES

18 The spelling יֶתֶר "Jethro") is found side by side with יִתְרוֹ (*yitrô*) in the same verse. Several commentators point to Nehemiah 6 where the same person, called Gashmu in v.6 (cf. NIV mg.), is called Geshem in vv.1 – 2 and in 2:19.The orthographic variation in Jethro is only in the retention of the ancient case

ending *o*.

19 Our insistence on the pluperfect for וַיֹּאמֶר (*wayyō²mer*) here as the way to solve the otherwise awkward flow of the materials is not accepted by many; S. R. Driver (*A Treatise on the Use of Tenses in Hebrew* [Oxford: 1892], sec. 76) does show, however, the imperfect consecutive with this meaning, though in rare instances.

In the NIV, נַפְשֶׁךָ (*napšekā*, lit., "your soul, your life") is simply rendered "you," viz., "wanted to kill you." This use of the Hebrew word *nepeš* ("soul"; GK 5883) to stand for the whole person is frequent in the OT and illustrates the phenomenon of the use of a part of a thing to represent its entirety.

20 Moses puts his wife and sons on הַחֲמֹר (*haḥᵃmōr*, "the donkey"), but the reference need not mean that all of them ride on a single donkey at one time. Bush, 1:63, argues that the singular is put for the plural — thus "each sits on his own donkey" — but Bush gives no evidence for this view. No doubt Moses' humble circumstances are intended by this picture of a single donkey.

21 The word מוֹפֵת (*môpēt*, "wonder"; GK 4603) is used thirty-six times in the OT to describe that which is extraordinary and a portent of the divine presence; nineteen of these instances refer to the plagues in Egypt. The most frequent word (seventy-nine examples in the OT) for the miracles connected with the exodus is אוֹת (*ʾôt*, "sign"; GK 253), which directs attention away from its unusual nature to the meaning and significance to which it points (cf. already 3:12; 4:8 – 9). Twenty-five of the seventy-nine instances of this word refer to the plagues of Egypt.

A third word, פֶּלֶא (*peleʾ*, "wonder, marvel"; GK 7099; or with fifty-one examples of Niphal feminine plural participle alone — *niplāʾōt*) has already been used in 3:20 of the events of the exodus and stresses the awesome and breathtaking nature of God's acts in delivering Israel. The nominal form of this verb, *peleʾ*, supplies a part of one of the names for the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6: "*Wonderful* Counselor." (For a discussion of these three terms, see H. Wheeler Robinson, "The Nature Miracles of the Old Testament," *JTS* 45 [1944]: 1 – 12.)

On the distinction between the three Hebrew words used for hardening, see

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 252 – 56. The verb used here is חָזַק (*ḥāzaq*, "to strengthen, confirm"). Bush, 1:65, argues that "the language implies simply [and he cites usage that agrees in Jdg 9:24; 2Ch 26:8; Isa 35:3; 41:7; Jer 23:14] that the course of events should be so ordered that, without any *positive divine influence* exerted upon him, the haughty king should take occasion to *confirm himself* in the disregard of the counsels of the Most High. . .. This God is said to *have done* because he *permitted it to be done*" (emphasis his).

24 חָזַק (*ḥāzaq*, "lodging place") is a stopping place, perhaps near a well, where travelers in those parts were accustomed to spending the night.

25 Stone instruments such as the צֹר (*ṣōr*,' "flint knife"; cf. Jos 5:2) were retained for ritual purposes long after the introduction of metal implements.

26 On the use of *la* meaning "with reference to" in לַמּוּלֹת (*lammûlōt*, "referring to circumcision"), see GKC, sec. 119u. The plural ending on "circumcision" does not seem to suggest that Zipporah circumcised both her sons but is presumably an abstract plural; the word is a *hapax legomenon*.

C. First Steps in Leadership (4:27 – 7:5)

1. Reinforced by a Brother (4:27 – 31)

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[27]The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the desert to meet Moses." So he met Moses at the mountain of God and kissed him. [28]Then Moses told Aaron everything the LORD had sent him to say, and also about all the miraculous signs he had commanded him to perform.

[29]Moses and Aaron brought together all the elders of the Israelites, [30]and Aaron told them everything the LORD had said to Moses. He also performed the signs before the people, [31]and they believed. And when they heard that the LORD was concerned about them and had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped.

COMMENTARY

27 – 28 At God's command (see comment on v.14b) Aaron, now eighty-three years old, is to meet Moses midway en route to Egypt at the "mountain of God" (i.e., Horeb, v.27; see comment on 3:1). As predicted in v.14 ("his heart will be glad when he sees you"), Aaron kisses Moses. The men have much to share as to what has happened during the forty years they have been apart, but Moses' words about God's liberating directives and miraculous signs are most prominent (v.28).

29 – 31 Immediately the narrative jumps ahead in time to the meeting with the elders of Israel (v.29; see comment on 3:16), which Moses was instructed to convene when he arrived in Egypt. Evidently God wishes to see duly constituted authority respected; therefore an appeal has to be made to Israel's existing leadership and their consent obtained before initiating any requests of Pharaoh. Aaron (cf. vv.13 – 16) acts as chief spokesman in relaying all that God had said to Moses (v.30). Though Moses was told (v.17) to perform the signs God gave in vv.1 – 9, in actuality both Moses and Aaron perform the miracles (note the plural, "you will do," in v.15 [NIV, "teach you what to do"]; see below, 7:19; 8:5, 16).

Since the elders represent the people and subsequently report to them what they have heard and seen from Moses and Aaron, the text quickly compresses each of these steps in v.30 by saying that all this is done "before" (lit., "in the sight of ") the people. The response is just as predicted in 3:18 — "they believe" (v.31; see Notes on v.5). The pressure of physical hardship has made this people more receptive here than in later years. Whether the signs are needed, as Moses feared in v.1, the text has no comment. Especially heartening is the fact that God cares about his people and their misery. Their response is immediately to worship the Lord, for he was the One who has "visited" (KJV; NIV, "was concerned about") them and has seen their trouble (v.31).

NOTE

31 פָּקַד (*pāqad*, "was concerned about," lit., "to visit") is used both positively ("to show concern for") and negatively ("to punish, judge") in the OT.

2. Rebuffed by the Enemy (5:1 – 14)

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[1]Afterward Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go, so that they may hold a festival to me in the desert.' "

[2]Pharaoh said, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go."

[3]Then they said, "The God of the Hebrews has met with us. Now let us take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, or he may strike us with plagues or with the sword."

[4]But the king of Egypt said, "Moses and Aaron, why are you taking the people away from their labor? Get back to your work!" [5]Then Pharaoh said, "Look, the people of the land are now numerous, and you are stopping them from working."

[6]That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: [7]"You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. [8]But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.' [9]Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies."

[10]Then the slave drivers and the foremen went out and said to the people, "This is what Pharaoh says: 'I will not give you any more straw. [11]Go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, but your work will not be reduced at all.' " [12]So the people scattered all over Egypt to gather stubble to use for straw. [13]The slave drivers kept pressing them, saying, "Complete the work required of you for each day, just as when you had straw." [14]The Israelite foremen appointed by Pharaoh's slave drivers were beaten and were asked, "Why didn't you meet your quota of bricks yesterday or today, as before?"

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 After an undefined interval of time (*wᵉʾaḥar*, "afterward"), Moses and Aaron, perhaps accompanied by the elders (cf. 3:18), go to Pharaoh and boldly demand that he release the people (v.1). They wish to celebrate a festival to this God in whose name the demand is being made, viz.,"the LORD [Yahweh], the God of Israel."

Pharaoh's retort to this affront to his sole right to command these slaves is crisp and cynical: "Who [*mî*; cf. Notes on 3:13] is the LORD?" (v.2) — offered, no doubt, in a demeaning tone of voice that signaled contempt and scorn. There is no sign that this is intended as an honest question, but rather the expression of an arrogant monarch who has never heard of Yahweh. Indeed, if God chooses to identify himself with such a hapless and hopeless lot of slaves, and if he is so powerless to effect their deliverance, why should Pharaoh fear him or obey his voice? Pharaoh's answer is clear: "No!"

3 Perhaps stunned by Pharaoh's insolence and arrogance, Moses and Aaron recast their request in somewhat milder terms. Moses and Aaron now act as representatives of the people (rather than ambassadors of Yahweh, as the messenger formula of v.1, "this is what the LORD . . . says," implies). Moreover, they speak in language given at the burning bush in 3:18, and the demand is changed to a humble request: "Let us take [*nēlᵉkâ nāʾ*; i.e., 'please'] a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD." (The rationale for sacrificing outside Egypt is given in 8:26. On the request for only a three-day journey, see comment on 3:18b.) Kenneth Kitchen noted that the Egyptian texts never speak of allowing brick-workers time off for anything, much less for religious purposes (*Ancient Orient and the Old Testament* [London: Tyndale, 1966], 156 – 57).

God's servants warn Pharaoh that should he disallow this temporary release, they may suffer untold losses; for this God might allow all sorts of pestilence to break out, or he might even send an invader across the eastern frontier, where Israel lives in vulnerable exposure. Whether this makes any difference or even an impression on Pharaoh is not known, but there may be an intimation here that any outbreak on Israel could spell disaster for this pagan monarch as well. The pestilence could spread as a contagious disease to the Egyptians, or it could

seriously cut down the workers needed for Egypt's ambitious building projects. It is almost as though Moses and Aaron are searching for some way to make an impact on this intransigent king.

4 – 14 Pharaoh is unmoved by any of these requests or threats. In his judgment the people are much too lazy or idle, and Moses and Aaron are disturbers of the peace at best and plotters of sedition against the throne at worst. His question to them is in essence, "Why are you encouraging this?" The inner meaning of Pharaoh's words in v.4 are contained in v.5: There are already too many people (another witness to God's covenantal faithfulness; see 1:7); why should he give them rest from their labors to further increase their numbers? Alternatively, some understand Pharaoh's question as, "Should I lose so large a percentage of my work force just for this little outing?" Pharaoh fails to recognize any validity to the arguments put forth in his presence — either to the need for time off to worship Yahweh or the existence of any emergency.

The Egyptian slave drivers (see comment and Notes on 1:11) are to instruct the Israelite "foremen" (šōṭᵉrîm, but not necessarily a reference to "scribes"; cf. 2Ch 26:11; 34:13, where "scribes" are distinguished from šōṭᵉrîm) that straw will no longer be provided for the bricks the Israelites must produce (vv.6 – 7). From then on they must rummage the countryside for what stubble and straw they can find without decreasing their daily quota of bricks (v.8). Brick quotas are abundantly documented in Egypt (see the article cited in Notes on v.7).

Chopped straw was mixed in with the clay to make the bricks more pliable and stronger by first binding the clay together and then by decaying and releasing a humic acid similar to glutamic or gallotanic acid (cf. C. F. Nims, "Bricks without Straw?" *BA* 13 [1950]: 22 – 28). So the people are scattered all over Egypt (v.12) while the slave drivers keep beating the Israelite foremen and pressuring them to meet their daily quota of bricks (vv.13 – 14).

NOTES

1 The word וְיָחֹגּוּ (wᵉyāḥōggû, "so that they may hold a festival") indicates that this is to be a pilgrimage festival. Compare the Islamic cognate *hadji,* a person who has made the pilgrimage; also the proper name Haggai.

3 נִקְרָא (*niqrāʾ*, "[he] has met [with us]") is literally, "he has called on us"; but since this exact phrase occurs in 3:18 and is spelled נִקְרָה (*niqrâ*, "[he] has met"), it is probably no more than a spelling variant often seen in some *lamed-he* verbs where the *aleph* and the *he* interchange.

7 For a depiction of ancient brick-making, see the fifteenth-century BC Theban tomb painting of Rekhmi- Re (J. B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East in Pictures* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969], no. 115; see comment on 1:11). See also the definitive article and bibliography by Kitchen, "Brickfields," 137 – 47.

7 – 8, 14 The expressions for time in these verses are כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם (*kitmôl šilšōm*, "no longer"); שִׁלְשֹׁם תְּמוֹל (*tᵉmōl šilšōm*, "as before"); כִּתְמֹל שִׁלְשֹׁם גַּם־תְּמוֹל גַּם־הַיּוֹם (*kitmôl šilšōm gam-tᵉmōl gam-ḥayyôm*, "yesterday or today [see Notes on 4:10], as before"). All are Oriental modes of speech in which the numerical "three" (*šilšōm*) is used for the day after the one nearest the present day, either in the past or in the future.

9 יִשְׁעוּ (*yiśʿû*, "they pay [no] attention to"), when used with the prepositions , *ʾel*, *ʿal* or *ḇᵉ*, actually means to have respect for a person or thing (cf. Ge 4:4: "God looked with favor on Abel") but when used with the preposition *bᵉ*, as here, it means "to meditate, to ponder orally [on a thing]," as in Psalm 119:117 (Bush, 1:77). The play on the word יַעֲשׂוּ (*yaʿᵃśû*), also with *bᵉ* ("so that they keep working"), is obvious.

בְּדִבְרֵי־שָׁקֶר (*bᵉdibrê-šāqer*, "lies") is literally "words of lying" (RSV, "pack of lies"). Pharaoh labels as false and presumptuous such illusory dreams about Israel's being suddenly released from their bondage.

3. Rebuffed by the Enslaved (5:15 – 21)

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[15]Then the Israelite foremen went and appealed to Pharaoh: "Why have you treated your servants this way? [16]Your servants are given no straw, yet

we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ Your servants are being beaten, but the fault is with your own people.”

[57]Pharaoh said, “Lazy, that’s what you are — lazy! That is why you keep saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to the LORD.’ [18]Now get to work. You will not be given any straw, yet you must produce your full quota of bricks.”

[19]The Israelite foremen realized they were in trouble when they were told, “You are not to reduce the number of bricks required of you for each day.” [20]When they left Pharaoh, they found Moses and Aaron waiting to meet them, [21]and they said, “May the LORD look upon you and judge you! You have made us a stench to Pharaoh and his officials and have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

COMMENTARY

15 – 16 It is one thing to receive opposition from the expected quarter of the enemy, but it is another thing to be rebuffed by the very people you are trying to deliver. The Hebrew foremen, unaware of the total deterioration of their position because of Moses’ and Aaron’s request of Pharaoh, personally appeal the “no-straw” policy laid on them by the slave drivers. In a courteous but bitter complaint they ask, “Why have you treated your servants this way? [We] are given no straw, yet we are told, ‘Make bricks!’ [We] are being beaten — and the fault is with your own people” (vv.15 – 16). This last charge seems deferentially to use the words “your people” in a circumlocution for Pharaoh himself. But whether it was a thinly veiled complaint out of respect and fear for the man and his power or because the foremen actually believe that the slave drivers are exceeding their authority cannot be determined from this context.

17 – 18 Pharaoh’s analysis of the situation has been reduced to a single word: “lazy” (*nirpîm*); that is what Israel is (v.17). He repeats the word for emphasis (v.17; cf. v.8). If their request was “Let us go . . . now” (v.17), then he is ready to render his conclusion: “Get to work” (v.18; see Notes on 3:9 – 10). No straw will be supplied, and no falling behind in quotas will be allowed either.

19 – 21 Only now does the real untenability of their position come home to the foremen (v.19). Apparently, Moses and Aaron have deliberately “stationed” (*niṣṣābîm*; NIV, “waiting,” v.20) themselves so as to be the first to debrief the men as

they emerge from their meeting with Pharaoh, for they have a fairly good idea of what the outcome is from the foremen's audience with the king of Egypt. What they probably do not expect is the full venting of the foremen's anger when they "found" (see Notes) them.

Instead of earning the respect of these Hebrew foremen for all their labors to alleviate their brutal condition, Moses and Aaron feel, in no uncertain terms, the heat of the foremen's anger. Almost like the prayer voiced by two men who hardly trust one another (cf. "May the LORD watch between you and me," in the Mizpah benediction of Ge 31:49), the foremen ask God to look and judge these two troublemakers; for they have made Israel's reputation stink (v.21). The words of vv.20 – 21 reflect those of v.3. Instead of a plague "striking" Israel and a "sword" coming, Moses and Aaron have put a sword in Pharaoh's hands.

NOTES

15 וַיִּצְעֲקוּ (*wayyiṣᶜaqû*, "They appealed," lit., "cried out") in the shrill voice of complaint.

16 The root *ḥṭ᾽* in the expression וְחַטָּאת עַמֶּךָ (*wᵉḥāṭāᵓt ᶜammekā*, "but the fault [is] with your [own] people") may be a verb (third person singular, perfect tense) or a noun with a feminine ending. But the form, Cassuto argues (71), is so strange as to suggest that the foremen almost begin to say וְחָטָאתָ אַתָּה (*wᵉḥāṭāᵓtā ᵓattâ*, "but [it is] you who are at fault") and then somewhat clumsily change it out of deference (before completing the first word) for Pharaoh and weakly added "your people."

20 "They found" (or "met") is a softened translation for וַיִּפְגְּעוּ (*wayyipgᵉᶜû*), which may also be translated, "they attacked." The meeting is anything but friendly. The normal word for "to meet" is יִפְגְּשׁוּ (*yipgᵉšû*).

4. Revisited by Old Objections (5:22 – 23)

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[22]Moses returned to the LORD and said, "O Lord, why have you brought

trouble upon this people? Is this why you sent me? [23]Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has brought trouble upon this people, and you have not rescued your people at all."

COMMENTARY

22 – 23 Even though Moses has been forewarned from the start that Pharaoh will not accede to God's requests or demands (see comment on 3:19 – 20), he is not prepared for the effect this refusal has on his fellow Hebrews. Filled with an "I told you so" attitude, it is Moses' turn to ask, "Why?" (v.22; cf. Pharaoh in v.4, the foremen in v.15): "Why have you brought trouble upon this people? Why did you ever send me [in the first place]?" (lit. tr.). Fortunately, Moses does not vent his wrath on the foremen, but he does pour out to God the keenness of his resentment. Moses does not charge God directly with authoring this evil, for the idiom only means that God has allowed and permitted such trouble as Pharaoh has thus spawned.

The clincher for Moses is v.23. In essence, his prayer is, "O Lord, why is all this happening? Why did you ever send me?" And then he concludes, "Besides, you haven't done what you said you would anyway — deliver them! I've done nothing but bring/make trouble since I arrived here!"

Obviously, Moses was again wrestling with some of his old objections (cf. 3:11 – 4:17). In his estimation things are moving too slowly, and the suffering is intensifying rather than letting up. Moses is once more his old, impetuous self.

5. Reinforced by the Name of God (6:1 – 8)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country."

[2]God also said to Moses,"I am the LORD. [3]I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not

make myself known to them. [4]I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. [5]Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

[6]"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. [7]I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. [8]And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.' "

COMMENTARY

1 There are no direct answers to Moses' questions to the Lord in 5:22 – 23; these are to be gathered from his experience as Israel's leader. But Moses' complaint about timing can now be answered, for God announces his "now"—he will delay no longer. The promised show of God's power will begin immediately with a show of his "mighty hand" (cf. 3:19).Whether God is the subject of "mighty hand" in v.1 may be debated since the possessive "my" is not in the Hebrew and because 12:33 uses the same root as in "mighty" (*hzq*) in a verbal form ("the Egyptians *urged* the people to hurry and leave"). Houtman, 1:499, suggests the rendering "under heavy pressure" for the NIV's "because of my mighty hand"; God will put pressure on Pharaoh.

2 The heart of God's response to Moses and the people is a fresh revelation of God's character and nature. One phrase stands out above all the other promises: "I am the LORD" (*ʾănî yhwh*). In fact, this declaration appears four times: (1) to open the message (v.2); (2) to affirm the first three verbal clauses of vv. 3 – 5 declaring that God will redeem them (v.6); (3) to underscore two more verbal clauses declaring that God will adopt them (v.7); and (4) to validate and confirm the dependability of two more first-person verbs promising that God will endow them with the land of Canaan and to sign his name, as it were, to the whole message (v.8).

Notice how similar the function of this formula is to another formula ("declares the LORD [*nᵉʾūm yhwh*]") in Jeremiah 31:31 – 34. In this new covenant passage, it also occurs four times: "Twice in the first section: at its beginning (v.31a), at its end (v.32b) and twice in the second section: at the beginning (v.33a) and at the end (v.34b)" (Bernhard W. Anderson, "The New Covenant and the Old," *The Old Testament and Christian Faith*, ed. B. W. Anderson [New York: Harper & Row, 1963], 230, n. 11).

3 – 5 Once again God reminds Moses that he is the God who promised the land of Canaan to the patriarchs and that he has seen the affliction of his chosen people (vv.3 – 5). According to much of critical scholarship, since 3:14 seems to reveal God's name as Yahweh, it is impossible to reconcile that text with 6:3. Surely, it is claimed, God would not reveal his name as a *new* name twice, would he? The way critical scholarship solved this duality was to attribute 3:14 – 15 to the "E" source and 6:3 to the "Priestly" (or "P") source that came in the postexilic period.

The best grammatical solution to this conundrum has come from W. J. Martin. He has argued that this is not a denial that the patriarchs ever knew the name of Yahweh; instead, it is a rhetorical question affirming implicitly that that is precisely the name by which the patriarchs knew God. Thus the translations would read: "I am Yahweh. I allowed myself to appear to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as El Shaddai. My name is Yahweh. Did I not make myself known to them?" (W. J. Martin, *Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch* [London: Tyndale, 1955], 181ff.;W. C. Kaiser Jr., *The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable and Relevant?* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2001], 138 – 43).

Another suggested solution, though not as helpful, notes that whereas in the past the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) knew God in the character of and in his capacity as El Shaddai (see Notes on the *beth essentiae* in *bᵉʾēl šaddāy*) — the name that disclosed his power to impart life, to increase the goods of life, and to deal with all unrighteousness — now he will be known as Yahweh. The name El Shaddai appears six times in the patriarchal narratives: Genesis 17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; and in part in 49:3. In Job it is used thirty times. Whether Shaddai reflects the Hebrew *šd* ("breast") or the Ugaritic *ṯdy* ("mountain") is not clear; hence we cannot say for certain whether El Shaddai is "God the Nourisher" or "God of the Mountain." But it is certain that the name

does reflect the might and power of God to work miracles. The LXX rendered El Shaddai in Job as *ho*pantokratōr (“the All-Ruler, Almighty”; see Kaiser, 97 – 99, 101, 106). This suggestion, while possible, lacks the support of the *beth essentiae* with Yahweh as it appears with El Shaddai.

Moses and Israel (and later even the Egyptians) will shortly know what “I am the LORD” means. This will not be the first instance of the use of that name, for already it was used some 162 times in Genesis, with thirty-four of those examples on the lips of speakers in Genesis. Significantly, people “began to call on the name of the LORD [Yahweh]” as early as Genesis 4:26; and Abraham named the place where he almost sacrificed Isaac, “The LORD Will Provide [Yahweh-Yireh]” (Ge 22:14). Similarly, the names Jochebed and Joshua are theophoric (i.e., have elements of “Yahweh” in them). It is difficult to claim that all of these are later modernizations for the older name of God.

Yahweh is the God who will personally, dynamically, and faithfully *be present* to fulfill the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The patriarchs had only the promises, not *the things* promised. The fullness of time has come when God will be known in the capacity and character of his name, Yahweh, as he fulfills what he has promised and does what he has decreed. These deeds may now be further enumerated and spelled out in the following seven promises of vv.6 – 8: “Therefore, say.”

6 – 8 The contents of God’s ancient promises are brought together and arranged so as to explain what “I am the LORD” means. “Therefore” (lākēn) is found only here in Exodus, though it becomes prominent in many passages of the prophets of later days. This particle will build on what has just preceded it and lead into what now follows.

(1) There were three first-person verbs with his *promise of redemption* (v.6):

I will bring you out;

I will free you;

I will redeem you.

Each of these verbs (and the four that follow) are in the Hebrew past (i.e., perfect) tense instead of the future tense, for so certain is God of their accomplishment that they are viewed as having been completed. In English, however, they are best rendered in the future (the so-called Hebrew prophetic perfect or inverted perfects). God will “redeem” (see Notes) Israel with the same “mighty acts of judgment” he has alluded to in 3:20 and 4:23 and predicted long ago to Abraham in Genesis 15:14. The plagues will be judgments for crimes as well as spectacular wonders to instill faith.

(2) Two more first-person verbs detail God’s *promise to adopt Israel* as his own people (v.7):

I will take you as my own people;

I will be your God.

These two promises serve as two parts of the tripartite formula to be repeated in the Old and New Testaments almost fifty times: “I will be your God, you shall be my people and I will dwell in the midst of you” (cf. Ge 17:7 – 8; 28:21; Ex 29:45 – 46; Lev 11:45).

(3) The last two promises focus on God’s *promise of the land* (v.8):

I will bring you to the land;

I will give it to you.

This God pledges with the oath of his uplifted hand (cf. Ge 22:16; 26:3) so that by two immutable things — his word of promise and his oath — Israel (and *all* subsequent believers, according to Heb 6:17 – 18) may have strong encouragement and solid confidence in the future. Then, as though to remind Israel once again, God concludes with his signature: “I am the LORD.”

NOTES

1יָד חֲזָקָה (*yād ḥ^ăzāqâ*, "my mighty hand") is possibly used as a polemic against New Kingdom pharaohs who routinely had *ḥpš* ("lord" or "possessor of [mighty] arm") as part of their titulary (cf. James K. Hoffmeier, "The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives," *Bib* 67 [1986]: 378 – 87).

2 Most literary critics complain that 6:2 – 7:7 (along with 11:1 – 13:22) evidences such a shift in vocabulary and retrogression in the narrative that it can only be considered as a doublet of chs. 1 – 4 (see Beegle, 117 – 18; Dennis McCarthy, "Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5 – 14," *JBL* 85 [1966]: 142, 158). An appeal is made to the unique appearance of the noun "divisions" (6:26; 7:4; 12:17, 41, 51), where elsewhere Israel is just "people"; "the mighty acts of judgment" (6:6; 7:4; 12:12); and the verb "to bring out" (*yṣ'*; e.g., 6:26; 7:4; chs. 11 – 13) instead of the more frequent verb "to let [the people] go" (*šlḥ*) in 7:8 – 10:27. But these distinctions fail to observe the accuracy of the standpoint of the speaker and the situation of the people. See further the Notes on vv.6, 26.

3 The ב (*b*) before El in בְּאֵל שַׁדָּי (*b^ĕʾēl šaddāy*, "as El Shaddai") is the *beth essentiae* (cf. 3:2; cf. GKC, sec 119i; BDB, 88f., 908). The force of this ב carries over to וּשְׁמִי יְהוָה (*ûš^ĕmi yhwh*, "but [by] my name, the LORD"). In both instances it is the character or capacity of that name that is in view, not the bare knowledge of the name as the label for his person. Likewise, the "name" also stood for his reputation, character, and accomplishments in doctrine and deeds (see *ZPEB*, 4:360 – 70; Motyer, 3 – 31; Robert Dick Wilson, "Yahweh [Jehovah] and Exodus 6:3," in *Classical Evangelical Essays in OT Interpretation* [ed. W. C. Kaiser Jr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972], 29 – 40).

לֹא נוֹדַעְתִּי (*lōʾ nôdaʿtî*, "I did not make myself known"; GK 3359) is a Niphal, not the Hiphil form *hôdaʿti* ("I did not let them know my name"). The meaning of this verb "to know" as related to Yahweh (it appears twenty-six times in the OT) should have been evident from its repetition to the Egyptians in the ten plagues — "that they might know the LORD" (cf. 7:5). If identity were the sole object, that would have been clear long before the tenth plague; but if acquaintance with the *character* of that name is the object, then the ten plagues will also have an evangelistic purpose.

However, there is also the matter of the לֹא (“not”). Why have nonevangelical scholars insisted on an absolute negative here instead of a comparative negative (e.g., as also in Jer 7:22 – 23) — and in a most literal way — even if they missed the import of the *beth essentiae* and the meaning of “to know”? W. J. Martin (*Stylistic Criteria and the Analysis of the Pentateuch* [London: Tyndale, 1955], 17), taking another approach, argued that this לֹא is an orthographic error for the original לוּ (“indeed”); but there is no evidence or need for that solution in this passage. Nor is the sentence an implied question without the somewhat customary interrogative הֲ (ibid, 18; cf. L. A. Herrboth, “Exodus 6:3b: Was God Known to the Patriarchs as Jehovah?” *CTM* 4 [1931]: 345 – 49; F. C. Smith, “Observations on the Use of the Names and Titles of God in Genesis,” *EvQ* 40 [1968]: 103 – 9).

4 – 5 וְגַם (*wᵉgam*, “also, moreover”) is used to emphasize, not to add (C. J. Labuschagne,“The Emphasizing Particle *gam*,” *Studia Biblica et Semitica* [Wageninger: Wageninger Univ. Press, 1966], 193 – 203).

6 On וּבִשְׁפָטִים גְּדֹלִים (*ûbišpāṭîm gᵉdōlîm*, “and with mighty acts of judgment”), see also 7:4 and 12:12. It is a frequent plural phrase in Ezekiel (e.g., Eze 5:10, 15; 11:9). These acts will include deliverance (for Israel) and judgment (for Egypt) just as the unusual plural of ṣdq (“righteous acts”) in Micah 6:5 and 1 Samuel 12:7 imply.

Out of the 277 times הוֹצִיא (*hôṣî*, “to bring out”) occurs in the OT, eighty-three use the formula וְהוֹצֵאתִי (*wᵉhôṣēʾtî*, “and I will bring [you] out”) for the exodus event. The הוציא (“will bring you out”) formula is used primarily with the miraculous crossing of the Reed Sea, whereas the העלה (“I brought you up”) formula (forty-one examples) is usually connected with the giving of the land (though cf. Dt 6:20 – 23; 26:5 – 9). The difference in the verbs is the difference in perspective. When viewed from the standpoint of Egypt, the exodus was a “bringing out”; but as soon as the sights are set on Canaan, the familiar topographical note is in vogue: they are “made to go up,” i.e., to go up to the hill country, as indeed Canaan was.

The verb גָּאַל (*gāʾal*, “to redeem”; GK 1457) is used to describe Boaz’s redemption of his close kin Ruth, when he married her and redeemed her property (Ru 3:12 – 13; 4:1 – 12). Here God performs the same service —

וְגָאַלְתִּי (*wᵉgāʾaltî*,' "and I will redeem [you]") — for his close kin Israel, by freeing them from slavery and redeeming their promised property in Canaan (cf. Lev 25:25, 47 – 55; 27:13; Dt 19:6 ["avenger"]; Isa 43:1).

6. Reminders of Moses' Lowly Origins (6:9 – 7:5)

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9 Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him
because of their discouragement and cruel bondage.
10 Then the LORD said to Moses, 11 "Go, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let
the Israelites go out of his country."
12 But Moses said to the LORD, "If the Israelites will not listen to me,
why would Pharaoh listen to me, since I speak with faltering lips?"
13 Now the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron about the Israelites and
Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he commanded them to bring the Israelites out
of Egypt.
14 These were the heads of their families:
The sons of Reuben the firstborn son of Israel were Hanoch and Pallu,
Hezron and Carmi. These were the clans of Reuben.
15 The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul
the son of a Canaanite woman. These were the clans of Simeon.
16 These were the names of the sons of Levi according to their records:
Gershon, Kohath and Merari. Levi lived 137years.
17 The sons of Gershon, by clans, were Libni and Shimei.
18 The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron and Uzziel. Kohath
lived 133years.
19 The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi.
These were the clans of Levi according to their records.
20 Amram married his father's sister Jochebed, who bore him Aaron and
Moses. Amram lived 137years.
21 The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nepheg and Zicri.
22 The sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan and Sithri.
23 Aaron married Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab and sister of
Nahshon, and she bore him Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar.
24 The sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah and Abiasaph. These were the

Korahite clans.

25Eleazar son of Aaron married one of the daughters of Putiel, and she bore him Phinehas.

These were the heads of the Levite families, clan by clan.

26It was this same Aaron and Moses to whom the LORD said, “Bring the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.” 27They were the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt about bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. It was the same Moses and Aaron.

28Now when the LORD spoke to Moses in Egypt, 29he said to him, “I am the LORD. Tell Pharaoh king of Egypt everything I tell you.”

30But Moses said to the LORD,“Since I speak with faltering lips, why would Pharaoh listen to me?”

7:1Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. 2You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. 3But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, 4he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. 5And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it.”

COMMENTARY

9 – 12 In spite of the grandeur of what “I am the LORD” means for Israel in the current situation, the people do not listen “for shortness of breath” (*miqqōṣer rûaḥ*). The NIV weakly translates “their discouragement” (v.9); but it is the inward pressure caused by deep anguish that prevents proper breathing — like children sobbing and gasping for their breath.

This makes such an impact on Moses that he has another attack of self-distrust and despondency. How can he persuade Pharaoh when he has failed so miserably to impress his own countrymen, who presumably have a naturally deep interest in what he has to say, given their circumstances (vv.11 – 12a)? Anyway, his lips are “faltering” (v.12b; NIV mg., “uncircumcised”) for the job

they have been given to do (cf. the “uncircumcised” ears of Jer 6:10; “uncircumcised” heart of Jer 9:26). Thus Moses has returned to his fourth objection as stated in 4:10. He is not worried about his ability to speak fluent Hebrew after such a long time away from Eygpt, nor is he claiming to have a speech impediment. He is only skeptical of his ability to be persuasive in influencing Pharaoh by means of his oratorical skills.

13 – 30 Many regard this section as an “interruption” of the narrative. But the narrative itself is at a turning point. The stage has been set in 1:1 – 6:12, and now the main action begins. However, before that action begins, it is important that the author once again remind his readers just who Aaron and Moses are, “to whom the LORD” has spoken (v.26). In fact, the whole genealogy of vv.14 – 25 is surrounded and framed by the near verbatim repetition of vv.10 – 13 in vv.26 – 30 and v.14a in v.25b. This genealogical list concentrates on the two men and how they happen to be at this precise and momentous juncture in the history of humankind and nations.

Everything in the list suggests that God’s choosing of Moses has nothing to do with natural advantage or ability. The list stops after naming only three of Jacob’s sons — Reuben, Simeon, and Levi —for its object has been reached. Moses and Aaron spring not from the “firstborn,” Reuben, but from Levi, Jacob’s third son — and not even then from Levi’s oldest son but from Kohath, his second son (vv.16 – 19). And Moses himself is not the oldest son of his father, for Aaron is older. Moses’ calling and election by God are gifts of grace not based on rights and privileges of birth.

Nor is Moses’ pedigree all that noble from a moral standpoint, for the mere mention of each of these three names is enough to remind contemporaries of an “informing theology” that rattles ethical skeletons in his past — Reuben committed incest with his father’s concubine (Ge 35:22), while Simeon and Levi were guilty of unwarranted outrage against Shechem (34:25 – 31). So wicked were the three older sons of Jacob that they each inherited a curse: Reuben lost his birthright as “firstborn” (Ge 49:3 – 4), and Simeon and Levi were denied an inheritance with the tribes and were scattered among them instead (49:5 – 8).

But this is not done in any fatalistic way; for while Reuben’s and Simeon’s descendants do morally follow in their fathers’ footsteps, Levi’s descendants,

with devotion to God, turn what was a curse into a blessing and use their dispersion throughout the tribes as an avenue of blessing to all through the priesthood and service at the sanctuary of God.

This honor did not prevent Levi's descendant Korah (vv.21 – 24) from destroying himself by his own rebellion (Nu 16); yet his descendants were not thereby forever adversely determined for evil, for they later rose to a place of high position in leading Israel in songs of praise in the temple and in composing Psalms 42 – 49, 84 – 85, and 87. So the *making* of "this same Moses and Aaron" and the *uses* they are put to after they were made are totally the work of God. There is nothing left for them to claim or boast about in their pedigree. Nevertheless, the record also makes plain that there is a congruity between the experiences and all the endowments that have accrued to Moses during these eighty years of life; thus election works in the natural realm as well as the spiritual.

The text repeats the words of vv.10 – 13 in vv.26 – 30 as though to say, "Look who is talking back to God! A man of few credentials except those given him in the providence and grace of God!" But never mind that, v.28 seems to affirm; it is now a whole new game. The style of the Hebrew grammar (see Notes) declares, "I am the LORD." The hour has come, and the name of Yahweh will be all the equipment Moses needs.

7:1 – 5 The theme here is similar to the point made in 3:18 – 22. While Yahweh has made Moses as "God" to Aaron and Aaron in turn as his "prophet" to the people, Moses has also been "ordained, appointed" (*nātan*) as "God" to Pharaoh in that he will speak and act with authority and power from above as God's representative. Aaron will be Moses' "prophet" addressing Pharaoh (v.1; cf. 4:15 – 16). Moses, then, will be the source of the divine oracles from above, and Aaron is to be God's mouthpiece. Few texts give us a better view of just what it means to be a prophet for God.

But again this team is warned that Pharaoh's heart will be "hardened" (*qāšā* [GK 7996], v.3; see on 4:21), even though God will graciously provide him with supporting evidence by way of signs and wonders. The announcement from God will be the *occasion* but not the *cause* of Pharaoh's actions. Nevertheless, after God has judged Egypt with his "mighty acts of judgment" (v.4; see Notes on

6:6), Israel will come out by its “divisions” (see Notes on 6:26).

Not only will Israel know what is meant by the name Yahweh, but so will the Egyptians. It will be as Jeremiah 16:21 described what it was to know “the LORD”: “Then they will know that my name is the LORD.” In addition to understanding the significance of the tetragrammaton (*yhwh*), these miracles will also be an invitation for the Egyptians to personally believe in this Lord. Thus the invitation is pressed repeatedly in 7:5; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 14:4, 18 — and some apparently do believe, for “a mixed multitude” (12:38, KJV) leaves Egypt with Israel.

NOTES

13 Whether this verse is a summary of chs. 3 – 5 (Rawlinson, 1:155) or an anticipation of Aaron’s active involvement in 7:1 – 5 is debatable, but it seems best to understand it as a renewal of the orders received at the burning bush just as a new start begins in 7:1.

14 רָאשֵׁי בֵית־אֲבֹתָם (*nāʾšê bēt-ʾbōtām*, “heads of their families”) is literally “heads of their father’s houses” (cf. Ge 12:1; 20:13; Ex 1:1; Nu 1:4). The word “house” came to mean “household” and thus “family.” The list for Reuben’s sons is identical to Genesis 46:9 and 1 Chronicles 5:3.

15 The list for the sons of Simeon is the same as Genesis 46:10, but it differs from Numbers 26:12 and 1 Chronicles 4:24. In the later two lists Jemuel is Nemuel, Zohar is Zerah, and Ohad is missing, perhaps because he subsequently died or because of some other unknown reason. In 1 Chronicles 4:24 Jakin appears as Jarib.

20 The “Amram” mentioned here is probably not the “man of the house of Levi” in 2:1, except in a removed sense (see comment on 2:1).The verb וַתֵּלֶד (*wattēled*,' “and she bore”) can be used of an ancestor removed by several generations as “bearing” great-grandchildren, even as Jacob’s two wives also “bore” the children their handmaids gave to Jacob (Ge 46:18, 25).

26; 7:4 The term צְבָאוֹת (*ṣᵉbāʾôt,*' "divisions" or "armies") has not previously been used of the people of Israel. Later this term with the name of Yahweh will become one of the most frequent names for God: "LORD of hosts" (NIV, "LORD Almighty"), e.g., as David was reassured as he went to meet Goliath in 1 Sam uel 17:45.

28 וַיְהִי בְּיוֹם דִּבֶּר (*wayʿhî bᵉyôm dibber,*' "Now when the Lord spoke") is literally, "And it came to pass in the day of [Yahweh's] speaking [to Moses]." The unusual Hebrew grammatical form has the noun "day" in the construct with the verb "he spoke" (cf. Ge 2:3; Hos 1:2 et al.).This construction highlights the fact that a new day has dawned.

D. Judgment and Salvation through the Plagues (7:6 – 11:10)

OVERVIEW

The plague account exhibits a clear and unified structure. Its unitary character has long been noticed, especially by Isaac Abravanel (1437 – 1508), Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (d. 1158), and Bahya ben Asher in his thirteenth-century commentary (see Ziony Zevit, "The Priestly Redaction and Interpretation of the Plague Narrative in Exodus," *JQR* 66 [1976]: 194, nn. 6 – 7).

The first nine plagues are arranged in three groups of three plagues each. The first plague in each group (viz., nos. 1, 4, 7) is introduced by a warning delivered to Pharaoh early in the morning as he goes out to the Nile (7:15; 8:20; 9:13 [though this last one does not specify the Nile]). The second plague in each group (nos. 2, 5, 8) is also introduced by a warning, but it is delivered to Pharaoh at his palace (8:1; 9:1; 10:1). The last plague in each group (nos. 3, 6, 9) begins without any warning (8:16; 9:8; 10:21).

When these same nine plagues are considered sequentially, however, they may be viewed in another arrangement of three sets of triplets in an ascending order of severity: the first three (nos. 1, 2, 3) introduce irritations, the second set (nos. 4, 5, 6) destructions, and the final set (nos. 7, 8, 9) death. Again, each plague in

the first set is brought on with the use of Aaron's staff (7:19; 8:5, 16); the first two plagues in the second set (nos. 4, 5) are the work of the Lord directly, while the last one (no. 6) is the result of Moses' word (8:24; 9:3, 6 and 10); and the last set of three (nos. 7, 8, 9) are all brought on by Moses with his outstretched hand and staff (9:22 – 23; 10:12 – 13, 21 – 22).

Other attempts to find the structure and meaning of the plagues are less convincing. Cassuto, 92 – 93, suggests that all ten plagues be broken down sequentially into sets of two according to the nature of the things affected: the Nile (nos. 1, 2); then two similar plagues (lice and flies; nos. 3, 4); animals and humans are next affected (nos. 5, 6); then crops are damaged (nos. 7, 8); then darkness of days and darkness of death (nos. 9, 10). There is insufficient evidence from the text to justify this arrangement, and the logic is missing in some (nos. 3, 4) or is forced in others (nos. 9, 10).

Dennis McCarthy ("Moses' Dealings With Pharaoh," *CBQ* 27 [1965]: 341 – 43) finds a concentric scheme that begins with the miracle of the staff turned into a snake numbered first and that continues through the nine plagues by dividing the miracle and nine plagues into two groups of five, so that the second set of five is matched with the first set in such a way that episode one is paired off with episode ten, two with nine, and so forth. But this chiastic arrangement is highly selective and artificial. Admittedly, it is dependent on certain key phrases and on the observation of the alternation of long and short units, but it neglects to account for some of these same key phrases in other units and includes the snake-staff miracle as number one. Most damaging is its failure to account for the real purpose and aim of these plagues.

Only the triplet grouping brings out the aim of the plagues and their sequence as recorded here. The initial plague in each triplet (nos. 1, 4, 7) has a purpose clause in which God sets forth for Moses his rationale and aim in bringing the hardships in that set:

The first set (7:17): "By this you [Pharaoh] will know that I am the LORD" (repeated in 8:10 and in effect in 8:19), meaning that Pharaoh will come to know just who Yahweh is and what the dynamic presence of his name signifies.

The second set (8:22): “That you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land,” meaning God’s overseeing providence and guidance of the world.

The third set (9:14): “So you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth,” meaning that the scope and force of God’s power (cf. 9:16, 29 – 30; 10:1) are beyond anything known to humankind in all the earth (see Labuschagne, 74 – 75, 92 – 94). In fact, this overall purpose for the plagues is already announced in 7:4 – 5.

This display of “power” and “signs” pointing to God’s person are also part of the psalmist’s appeal to these plagues in Psalms 78:42 – 51 and 105:28 – 38.

Plague	**Aaron’s staff introd.**	**Moses’ staff introd.**	**Deliv’d at the Nile**	**Deliv’s at the palace**	**Began without warning**	**Pharaoh hardens his heart**	**God hardens heart**	**Sets triple**
1 Nile	X		X			X		Irritat
2 Frogs	X			X		X		“
3 Gnats	X				X	X		“
4 Flies			X			X		Destruc
5 Cattle				X		X		“
6 Boils					X		X	“
7 Hail		X	X					Deat
8 Locusts		X		X			X	“
9 Darkness		X			X		X	“
10 Firstborn							X	

1. Presenting the Signs of Divine Authority (7:6 – 13)

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[6]Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them. [7]Moses was

eighty years old and Aaron eighty-three when they spoke to Pharaoh.

[8]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [9]"When Pharaoh says to you, 'Perform a miracle,' then say to Aaron, 'Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh,' and it will become a snake."

[10]So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did just as the LORD commanded. Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. [11]Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: [12]Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs. [13]Yet Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the LORD had said.

COMMENTARY

6 – 9 After eighty years of preparation Moses begins his life's work (v.6): "Moses and Aaron did just what the LORD commanded them." It is only fair for Moses to record his faithfulness to God's command just as he frankly records his failures to obey God's commands. He and Aaron must reappear before Pharaoh, who in turn will ask them to perform a miracle, presumably to assure him that they are messengers of Israel's God (vv.7 – 9). Undoubtedly his tone is supercilious and he expects there will be no miracle, for he must have judged Moses and Aaron to be nothing but opportunists and insurrectionists. Pharaoh's literal words are: "Give a miracle for yourselves" (v 9), as though it were more important that it be done for the sake of Moses and Aaron than for Pharaoh.

Significantly, Scripture judges Pharaoh's demand for validation of such claims as reasonable even if given with the wrong attitude. The Lord informs Moses to use the first of the three signs he used to convince Israel that he is indeed an accredited messenger of God (v.9; see 4:2 – 9, 30 – 31). However, in this instance Aaron's staff (it is the same as Moses' staff or the staff of God; cf. 4:17; 7:15, 17, 19 – 20) when cast down becomes a *tannîn* ("great serpent, dragon, crocodile"; see Notes; in 4:3 – 4 it became a *nāhāš*, "snake.") The connection of *tannîn* with the symbol of Egypt is clear from Psalm 74:13 and Ezekiel 29:3.

10 – 13 Moses and Aaron do exactly as God instructs them — only to learn that Pharaoh's wise men, sorcerers, and magicians (see Notes) are able to imitate

the same feat by their magical arts (vv.10 – 11; see Notes). The use of magic in Egypt is well documented in the Westcar Papyrus, in which magicians are credited with changing wax crocodiles into real ones only to be turned back to wax again after seizing their tails. Montet (92 – 94, fig. 17) also refers to several Egyptian scarabs that depict a snake charmer holding a serpent made stiff as a staff up in the air before some observing deities (cf. *ANET*, 326, with a spell on a "spotted" knife [representing a snake?] that "goes forth against its like" and devours it).

The relationship between Aaron's miracle and the magical act of the magicians (whom Paul calls Jannes and Jambres in 2Ti 3:8) is hard to define. Possibly by illusion and deceptive appearances they are able to cast spells over what appear to be their staffs but which are actually serpents rendered immobile (catalepsy) by pressure on the nape of their necks and by the use of magical spells. Or perhaps it is done via demonic power. (For a fuller treatment of this difficult subject, see Keil and Delitzsch, 1:475 – 77.) However, as evidence of God's greater power, Pharaoh's magicians lose their "staffs" when Aaron's staff "swallows up" theirs. But Pharaoh is unaffected. His heart "becomes hard" (v.13; there is no reflexive or passive idea to the verb *yeḥ·zaq*, as so many translations render it).

9 תַּנִּין (*tannîn*, "snake, serpent") is usually used for larger reptiles (Ge 1:21; Dt 32:33) such as crocodiles (Eze 29:3) or a sea monster and leviathan (Job 7:12; Isa 27:1; 51:9; Jer 51:34). It also is often used metaphorically as a symbol of national empires and power (e.g., Dt 32:33; Ps 74:13; Eze 29:3).

11 חֲכָמִים (*ḥ·kāmîm*, "wise men") are the learned and schooled men of that day.

מְכַשְּׁפִים (*m·kaš·pîm*, "sorcerers, magicians") is the intensive participle of the verb *kšp* ("to pray, offer prayers"). It is used in the OT only in the sense of sorcery.

חַרְטֻמִּים (*ḥarṭummîm*, "magicians") is always plural in the OT except in Daniel 2:10 (cf. Ge 41:8, 24; Ex 7:22; 8:7, 18 - 19; 9:11; Da 1:20; 2:2). It derives from an Egyptian loanword, *ḥry-ḥbt*, later shortened to *ḥry-tp* ("the chief of the priests"). In a seventh-century BC Assyrian document it appears as *ḥar-ṭibi* (D. B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph* [Leiden: Brill, 1970], 203 - 4).

בְּלַהֲטֵיהֶם (*bᵊlahᵃṭêhem*, "by their secret arts") is from the root לוּט (*lûṭ*, "to enwrap"; spelled here with an infixed *he* but without it in 7:22), hence the meaning "mysterious" or "secret." The Egyptian word for magic is *ḥikeʾ*.

2. First Plague: Water Turned to Blood (7:14 – 24)

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14 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Pharaoh's heart is unyielding; he
refuses to let the people go. 15 Go to Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out
to the water. Wait on the bank of the Nile to meet him, and take in your
hand the staff that was changed into a snake.
16 Then say to him, 'The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has sent me to
say to you: Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert.
But until now you have not listened.
17 This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the
LORD: With the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water of the Nile,
and it will be changed into blood. 18 The fish in the Nile will die, and the
river will stink; the Egyptians will not be able to drink its water.' "
19 The LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Take your staff and stretch out
your hand over the waters of Egypt — over the streams and canals, over the
ponds and all the reservoirs' —and they will turn to blood. Blood will be
everywhere in Egypt, even in the wooden buckets and stone jars."
20 Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD had commanded. He raised his
staff in the presence of Pharaoh and his officials and struck the water of the
Nile, and all the water was changed into blood. 21 The fish in the Nile died,
and the river smelled so bad that the Egyptians could not drink its water.
Blood was everywhere in Egypt.
22 But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and
Pharaoh's heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just
as the LORD had said. 23 Instead, he turned and went into his palace, and
did not take even this to heart. 24 And all the Egyptians dug along the Nile to
get drinking water, because they could not drink the water of the river.

COMMENTARY

14 – 18 God instructs Moses to go early (cf. 8:20) in the morning with his brother, Aaron, to intercept Pharaoh and his officials as they go out to the Nile (v.15; cf. v.20). Pharaoh's purpose for going to the Nile with his officials remains unknown. Perhaps he is there to worship the Nile River god, Hapi. Moses and Aaron, however, are there to remind Pharaoh that "the LORD, the God of the Hebrews" (v.16) has sent them (5:1); yet the king of Egypt remains resolute in his defiance of this Lord. So God will help Pharaoh "know" who he is (v.17), insofar as Pharaoh protested in 5:2, "I do not know the LORD." God will change the water of the Nile River into blood when Moses strikes it with his staff (v.17).

It is clear that v.17 and later 17:5 make Moses alone the user of the staff against the Nile River, but 7:19 has God instructing Moses to tell Aaron to stretch out his hand over all the waters in all Egypt so that they will be changed into blood.This hardly seems to be two different events of action by the two men. Verses 20 – 21 treat it as a single event; and it is not a clumsily overlooked inconsistency that leaves the trail of the divergent sources from which the material came. Instead, it is an "example of the phraseology by which an agent is said to do that which he commands or procures to be done" (Bush, 1:96; cf. Hos 8:1).

19 – 21 When Aaron stretches out his staff and strikes what the Egyptians regard as sacred, the Nile and the water all over Egypt turn to blood. What is the "blood"? W. M. Flinders Petrie (*Egypt and Israel* [London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1911], 25 – 36) was the first to suggest that the sequence of the plagues followed a natural cycle and all happened in one year. More recently Greta Hort ("The Plagues of Egypt") traced this connected sequence by beginning with an unusually high Nile flood in July and August. The sources for the Nile's inundation are the equatorial rains that fill the White Nile, which originates in east-central Africa (present-day Uganda) and flows sluggishly through swamps in eastern Sudan; and the Blue Nile and the Atbara River, which fill with melting snow from the mountains and become raging torrents filled with tons of red soil from the basins of both rivers — the higher the inundation, the deeper the color of the red waters.

In addition to this discoloration, a type of algae known as flagellates comes from the Sudanese swamps and Lake Tana along the White Nile and produces

the stench and deadly fluctuation in the oxygen level of the river that proves to be fatal to fish. Such a process, at the command of God, seems to be the case for this first plague rather than any chemical change of the water into red and white corpuscles (cf. Joel 2:31 — "the moon [will be changed] to blood" — or 2 Kings 3:22, where the water looked "like blood").

Unlike other plagues and in agreement with this natural phenomenon, this plague does not stop suddenly. This explanation was accepted already by such conservatives as Keil and Delitzsch (1:478 – 79), Lange (20), and more recently Kitchen (*NBD*, 1000 – 1002). This change affected the "streams" (= seven [in Herodotus] branches of the Nile), the canals (to fertilize the fields), the ponds (left from the overflowing Nile), and the reservoirs (artificially made to store water for later use).

22 – 24 Once again Pharaoh's magicians apply their "secret arts" and imitate the miracle sufficiently to blunt the force of it on Pharaoh's conscience (v.22). The question of where they find any unblemished water if the fourfold water system in "all Egypt" (vv.19, 21) is affected is answered in v.24 —subterranean water from freshly dug wells. The expression "all" or "every" must not be pressed in this case on the analogy of 9:6, 11, and 25 (cf. the obvious hyperbole of 10:5; Ge 41:57, "*All* the countries came to Egypt to buy grain"; Mt 3:5, "*All* Judea and the *whole region* of the Jordan" [emphases mine]). Bush, 1:78, chides, "If they had had any confidence in their own art, they would rather have attempted to turn the blood into water than . . . to ape the miracle of Moses . . . though there is no evidence of their succeeding even in this." But Pharaoh remains unmoved and merely returns to his palace from the bloody river's edge; his heart grows rigid and hard in spite of this evidence (v.23).

NOTES

19וּבָעֲצִים וּבָאֲבָנִים (*ûbaʿăṣîm ûbāʾbānîm*) is (lit.), "and in wooden [things] and in stone [things]." The NIV's "in the wooden buckets and stone jars" is doubtful since vessels of wood and stone were not common in Egypt. Hyatt, 106, is most certainly incorrect — "even the sap in the trees and the springs . . . in stony places," as is Cassuto, 99, when he conjectures that the water used to wash the *idols of* wood and stone also turned to blood (the preposition *b* he interpreted as

"on"). Rawlinson, 1:172, had a better suggestion: "in the wooden and stone settlement tanks," which were used for storing the Nile River water so that the sediment would sink before the water was used. Egypt often received no rain and never more than ten inches of rainfall per year in the delta.

23 וְלֹא שָׁת לִבּוֹ (*wᵉlō' šāt libbô*, "and [he] did not take even this to heart") is an expression widely used in the OT (e.g., 9:21; cf. Hag 1:5, 7; 2:15, 18 with the verb *sîam*). It means simply, "pay attention."

3. Second Plague: Frogs (7:25 – 8:15)

[25]Seven days passed after the LORD struck the Nile. [8:1]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him, 'This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. [2]If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. [3]The Nile will teem with frogs. They will come up into your palace and your bedroom and onto your bed, into the houses of your officials and on your people, and into your ovens and kneading troughs. [4]The frogs will go up on you and your people and all your officials.' "

[5]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your hand with your staff over the streams and canals and ponds, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.' "

[6]So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. [7]But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.

[8]Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Pray to the LORD to take the frogs away from me and my people, and I will let your people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD."

[9]Moses said to Pharaoh, "I leave to you the honor of setting the time for me to pray for you and your officials and your people that you and your houses may be rid of the frogs, except for those that remain in the Nile."

[10]"Tomorrow," Pharaoh said.

Moses replied,"It will be as you say, so that you may know there is no one like the LORD our God. [11]The frogs will leave you and your houses, your officials and your people; they will remain only in the Nile."

[12]After Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh, Moses cried out to the LORD
about the frogs he had brought on Pharaoh. [13]And the LORD did what
Moses asked. The frogs died in the houses, in the courtyards and in the
fields. [14]They were piled into heaps, and the land reeked of them. [15]But
when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and would
not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said.

7:25 – 8:5 Seven days after the first plague has begun, God instructs Moses and Aaron to take their demands to the king's palace (cf. 7:23; 7:25 – 8:1). If he refuses to grant their repeated request to go to the desert to worship the Lord, they are to announce in the set formula, "I will plague your whole country with frogs" (v.2). This is not to be a "sign" but a "plague" only (see Notes). In comparison with what is to come, this is only a trivial annoyance.

6 – 7 On Aaron's signal frogs emerge from the water and "cover" the land, says the text with legitimate hyperbole (v.6). These pesky creatures, though regarded as sacred to the Egyptians, are God's scourge to whip people into facing the living God. The intensification of the nuisance by Pharaoh's magicians is totally ignored by him (v.7). Tons of croaking, crawling, creeping intruders are everywhere.

8 – 15 Why should the frogs so suddenly abandon their natural habitat in August during a high Nile and invade the homes, bedrooms, ovens, kneading troughs, and even the palace itself? And why should they likewise die off so suddenly? Hort, 95 – 98, finds the connection to be in the dead fish killed by flagellates. The frogs abandon all the polluted and overflowing waterways (cf. 7:19) and seek cover from the sun on dry land in homes where possibly the presence of some unadulterated water attracts them. However, since they have already been exposed to spores of *bacillus anthracis* from the death spread along the waterways, the frogs also collapse and die.

Pharaoh has finally been forced to acknowledge the power of Yahweh, not by the armies of men, but by squadrons of loathsome little frogs. Now he knows who this "LORD" is (cf. 5:2), and he accedes to Moses' and Aaron's request (v.8) — only to renege later on (v.15).

Moses' response to Pharaoh's desperate or, as some think, cynical plea is to

dare Pharaoh to test his prophetic credentials (v.9) and, more importantly, the power of God (v.10) by setting the time when he wishes to be rid of this plague. Pharaoh's quick response of "tomorrow" leads Moses to enter into some intensely earnest prayer (v.12, the whole scene recurs with Elijah in a similar daring contest of prayer with the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:36 – 37). Moses' freedom to negotiate on his own terms and then to have, as it were, God back him up is remarkable.

The frogs drop dead everywhere — in the houses, fields, and open courtyards (v.13). Frogs are piled up in heaps, and there is a firm reminder to aid Pharaoh's wavering memory — the stench of dead frogs (v.14). Nevertheless, that fades and so does Pharaoh's permission. This "relief " (*hārwāḥâ*, v.15) is worse than the plague for this proud king. People do not often learn the righteousness of God when granted mercy and favor (Ps 78:34 – 42; Isa 26:10).

NOTES

8:1[7:26] The rendering of the *waw* conjunction to introduce a purpose clause agrees with usage here in וְיַעַבְדֻנִי (*wᵉyaʿabᵈunî*, "so that they may worship me") and in 7:11 – 12; 8:7 – 8.

2[7:27] Surprisingly few Hebrew terms are used for the plagues in this narrative. Actually, only in 9:14 is the word מַגֵּפָה (*maggēpōt*, "plagues") used. Here it is נֹגֵף (*nōgēp*, "plague"). In 12:13 it is נֶגֶף (*negep*, "a hit, pestilence"); in 11:1, נֶגַע (*negaʿ*, "stroke"); and in 9:3, 15, דֶּבֶר "pestilence"). The NIV uniformly renders these as "plague." Hebrew has "border" used as a metonym for Egypt's "territory" or "land" (NIV has the "whole country").

צְפַרְדְּעִים (*ṣᵉpardᵉʿîm*, "frogs") may be the Hebrew equivalent of the Egyptian Arabic name *dôda* or, as Cole suggests (91), an onomatopoeic form that attempts to imitate the cacophony of their incessant croaks. Frogs were associated with the froghead goddess Heqet, who assisted women at childbirth. The scientific name for these frogs, which are similar to our toads, is *Rama Mosaica*. Frogs are only mentioned in the OT in connection with this plague (see Pss 78:45; 105:30). Notice in v.6 that "the frog [singular in Hebrew] came up" is again used for the collective (NIV, "frogs"). "Possibly the writer consciously used the sing. 'frog'

[*tsephardēa*]: the frogs were so numerous that they could no longer be distinguished; it is as if one humongous frog, one big monster has Egypt in its grip" (Houtman, 2:47).

4. Third Plague: Gnats (8:16 – 19)

> [16]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell Aaron, 'Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,' and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats." [17]They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came upon men and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. [18]But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. And the gnats were on men and animals.
>
> [19]The magicians said to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." But Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not listen, just as the LORD had said.

COMMENTARY

16 – 17 The third plague begins without warning to Pharaoh or h magicians. God again uses the outstretched staff in the hand of Aaron to initiate this plague.Aaron strikes the dust of the ground, just as he struck the Nile in the first plague (7:20), and "*all* the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats" (8:17, emphasis mine) — another hyperbole to stress the tremendous extent and intensity of this pestilence (cf. 7:19, 21; 9:6, 19, 25; 10:5).

The word "gnats" (*kinnîm*) occurs five times in this passage and nowhere else (except in Ps 105:31, unless another reading is verified in Isa 51:6). It is debatable whether this word means "lice" (as in the KJV, Peshitta, Josephus, and Targum Onqelos) or "gnats, mosquitoes," as we favor with most interpreters, especially the translators of the LXX (who had firsthand acquaintance with Egypt [Gk. *skniphes*]).

18 – 19 On their fourth attempt to duplicate the miracles of Moses and Aaron, the Egyptian magicians admit defeat (v.18). Nevertheless, in spite of what

success they experienced in the previous three encounters (and it may well have been through slight of hand, given the advance notice of the nature of the plague or sign in those cases — or perhaps it was just plain demonic, supernatural empowerment to mimic God's power), they now realize that the plague of the gnats is the "finger of God" (v.19; cf. Dt 9:10; Mt 12:28; Lk 11:20), i.e., the result of his power (see Notes). "Finger" signifies God alone is responsible for this plague, not Moses and/or Aaron. But Pharaoh is not persuaded in his heart and mind; he remains adamant and opposed to any Israelite demands.

NOTES

7[8:3] On "secret arts," see Notes on 7:11.

9[8:5] הִתְפָּאֵר עָלַי (*hitpāʾērʿālay*) is a difficult phrase. The LXX has "appoint for me," but more literally it is "glorify yourself over me."This is more than an ordinary courtesy; it is an invitation to give Pharaoh the upper hand for the moment. The NIV translates it, "I leave to you the honor of." Houtman, 2:48, translates it, "Please have it your way," by emending the text from *pʾr* to *bʾr*, "make it clear [to me]."

10[8:6] לְמָחָר (*lᵉmāḥār*, "tomorrow"; lit., "for tomorrow") is Pharaoh's answer to Moses' question: (lit.) "*For* when" or "*For* what date shall I ask in prayer to God?" (v.9). Pharaoh may have suspected that Moses is stalling for time, so he picks the earliest possible time for the removal of the plague that Moses may not have anticipated or thought of using.

12[8:8] וַיִּצְעַק (*wayyiṣʿaq*, "and [Moses] cried out") is a strong expression to denote the earnestness and intensity of the prayer.

16[8:12] כִּנִּם (*kinnîm*, "gnats") appears in vv.17 – 18[13 – 14] as a feminine collective (*hakkinnam*) since it is governed by the third person singular verb תְּהִי (*tᵉhî*, lit., "she came"). As prolific as is the dust, so there come zillions of gnats!

19[8:15] אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים (*ʾeṣbaʿ ʾĕlōhîm*, "finger of God") is a figure of speech called synecdoche, where a portion (here of the divine person) is used to denote the

totality (of his power; see “finger of God” in Ex 31:18; Ps 8:3; Lk 11:20; “hand of God” in 1Sa 6:9; Ps 109:27). Cook, 281, argues that the expression is thoroughly Egyptian. It either attributes this act of God as being hostile to one of their protecting gods (e.g., the god of the earth, Set), or it equates Aaron’s wooden rod with the finger of a specific deity (see, e.g., ch. 153 of the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*). Synecdoche is the preferable explanation, because the magicians’ attitude is contrasted with Pharaoh’s hardheartedness.

5. Fourth Plague: Flies (8:20 – 32)

[20]Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning and confront Pharaoh as he goes to the water and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. [21]If you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials, on your people and into your houses. The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies, and even the ground where they are.

[22]“ ‘But on that day I will deal differently with the land of Goshen, where my people live; no swarms of flies will be there, so that you will know that I, the LORD, am in this land. [23]I will make a distinction between my people and your people. This miraculous sign will occur tomorrow.’ ”

[24]And the LORD did this. Dense swarms of flies poured into Pharaoh’s palace and into the houses of his officials, and throughout Egypt the land was ruined by the flies.

[25]Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Go, sacrifice to your God here in the land.”

[26]But Moses said, “That would not be right. The sacrifices we offer the LORD our God would be detestable to the Egyptians. And if we offer sacrifices that are detestable in their eyes, will they not stone us? [27]We must take a three-day journey into the desert to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God, as he commands us.”

[28]Pharaoh said, “I will let you go to offer sacrifices to the LORD your God in the desert, but you must not go very far. Now pray for me.”

[29]Moses answered, “As soon as I leave you, I will pray to the LORD, and tomorrow the flies will leave Pharaoh and his officials and his people. Only be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again by not letting the people go to offer sacrifices to the LORD.”

[30]Then Moses left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD, [31]and the LORD did what Moses asked: The flies left Pharaoh and his officials and his people; not a fly remained. [32]But this time also Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let the people go.

COMMENTARY

20 – 21 As in the first plague, Moses must intercept Pharaoh again as he goes down to the Nile early in the morning. Cook, 281, postulates that the occasion for this royal procession is to open the solemn festival held 120 days after the first rising of the Nile, i.e., at about the end of October or the beginning of November. This time Pharaoh and all of his people and their houses are threatened with a plague of "flies" (*hᵉʿārōb*).

Modern attempts to identify these creatures include (1) beasts, reptiles, and insects, supposing the word represents an Arabic root meaning "unmixed" (cf. that meaning in 12:38; NIV, "other people"); (2) the "dogfly," as rendered by the LXX (*kynomuia*), a bloodsucking gadfly which, however, appears in the spring of the year and not the fall, when this plague occurs; (3) the ordinary housefly, which serves in Isaiah 7:18 as a symbol for Egypt (though the Hebrew word there is *zᵉbûb*); and (4) the beetle *Blatta Orientalis*, which gnaws clothes, furniture, plants, humans, and beasts, arrives in late November, and bears a close resemblance to the Hebrew *ʿārōb* in an Egyptian word retained in Coptic, *abeb* (Cook, 490; Knight, 63 – 64, compares it to the scarab beetle).

It seems best to follow Hort, 99, 102, and say that the fly *Stomoxys Calcitrans* best fulfills all the conditions of the text. This fly multiplies rapidly in tropical or subtropical regions (hence the delta with its Mediterranean climate would be exempt) in the fall by laying its six hundred to eight hundred eggs in dung or rotting plant debris. When it is fully grown, the fly prefers to infest houses and stables, and it bites both humans and animals, usually in the lower extremities. Thus it becomes the principal transmitter of skin anthrax (see the sixth plague), which it contracts by crawling over the carcasses of animals that have died of internal anthrax.

22 – 24 By inaugurating a "distinction" (see Notes) between Moses' people

and Pharaoh's people, God aids those hardened Egyptian hearts who suspect that nothing more than chance or difficult times were involved in the preceding three plagues. This distinction is found in the fourth, fifth, seventh, ninth, and tenth plagues (v.23; 9:4, 6, 26; 10:23; 11:7). The purpose of this preferential treatment of Israel is to teach Pharaoh and the Egyptians that the Lord God of Israel is in the midst of this land doing these works; it is not one of their local deities.

Gods were thought by ancient Near Easterners to possess no power except on their own home ground. But not so here! The innocent are being delivered and the guilty afflicted because Israel's God is in their midst. God will again do a "miraculous sign" designed to evoke the Egyptians' faith and their release of Israel (see Notes on 4:8).

In another innovative feature Moses announces in advance when the plague is due to strike, giving the Egyptians time to repent. This advance notice is found in the fourth, fifth, sixth, eighth, and tenth plagues (v.21; 9:5, 18; 10:4; 11:4). Moreover, Pharaoh and his court are again singled out as the first victims of this plague because of the heavy responsibility they bear for their intransigence (vv.21, 24).

25 – 32 Moses' claim that if Israel sacrificed animals in Egypt, it would be extremely offensive to the Egyptians has been challenged by some commentators as a clever ruse on Moses' part. Yet Rylaarsdam, 901, documents a violent Egyptian reaction to Jewish sacrifices in the fifth-century BC colony at Elephantine (A. E. Cowley, *Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century BC* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1923], 108 – 22). Thus Moses rejects Pharaoh's counteroffer to allow Israel to sacrifice in Egypt (v.25).

Finally, Pharaoh concedes the long-denied permission. With a note of self-importance he pontificates, "*I* [*ʾānōkî*] will let you go . . . but [*raq*] you must not go very far" (v.28).And as though to show what his real thoughts are all along, he quickly adds, "Now pray for me." Pharaoh shrewdly takes advantage of the fact that Moses has not said this time that they must go outside the country to worship. So Pharaoh — *Venenum in cauda est!* ("a snake lurks in the grass," Houtman, 2:59), slips in the words "in the land" with his apparently concessive permission.

Moses will not be put down, for his mission likewise has dignity; thus he, too, begins with the pronoun "I" [*ʾānōkî*] "*I* am leaving you, and *I* will pray" (v.29, lit. tr.). Moses, with an obvious rebuke, says in effect, "Don't you 'however' me when you are in such a poor bargaining position." But then on a courteous note, with a switch to the third-person form of address, he continues, "Only [*raq*] be sure that Pharaoh does not act deceitfully again."

The plague is removed through Moses' prayer (cf. Elijah, 1Ki 18:42;Amos, Am 7:2, 5). So effective is the power of prayer and the evidence that God is in their midst that "not a fly remained" (v.31). But Pharaoh once again (cf. second plague, 8:15) returns to his hard-nosed stand once he obtains the physical relief he desires.

NOTES

21[17] עָלֶיהָ ... אֲשֶׁר (*ʾăšer ... ʿāleyhā*, "where . . . are") is literally, "on which, where." "Even the ground where they [i.e., the Egyptians] are" is sharply contrasted with v.22's *ʿāleyhā* ("Where [my people live]").

22[18] The LXX renders וְהִפְלֵיתִי (*wᵉhiplêtî*, "I will deal differently") as "I will marvelously glorify," misunderstanding it as from פָּלָא (*pālāʾ*). The term occurs again in 33:16: "What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on . . . earth?" (cf. also 9:4; 11:7).

גֹּשֶׁן (*gōšen*, "Goshen") was the eastern delta region. About fifty miles northeast of modern Cairo is the Wadi Tumilat, a valley five or six miles wide and thirty miles long ending in Lake Timsah, now part of the present-day Suez Canal. The name "Goshen" in an Egyptian (hieroglyphic) name is spelled (like the other two delta names) with a word beginning with a bull, *ka* (= Hebrew first syllable *Go*).

23[19] פְּדֻת (*pᵉdūt*, "a distinction"; GK 7014) is correct here even though *pᵉdūt* generally is rendered "redemption" or "deliverance" (a concept used of the impending exodus in 6:6; cf. *gāʾal*, "to redeem [as a kinsman]"). To emend the text to read *pelut* ("separation") is unwarranted since that nominal form would be a *hapax legomenon*. I agree with G. I. Davies ("The Hebrew Text of Exodus VIII

19 [EVV 23]: An Emendation," *VT* 24 [1974]: 489 – 92) that the letter *d* was omitted by haplography from the text, which originally read *prdt* (from the verb *prd*, "to separate") in the Hiphil, used three times in the OT with *bên* ("between"; Ru 1:17; 2Ki 2:11; Pr 18:18).

24[20] תִּשָּׁחֵת ... אֶרֶץ (*ʾereṣ ... tiššāḥēt*, "the land was ruined") contrasts with Psalm 78:45, which says that the flies "devoured them" (*wayyoʾkᵉlēm*), i.e., the Egyptians themselves, while it was the frogs that "devastated [= ruined] them" (*wattašḥitēm*). Apparently both plagues had devastating effects.

6. Fifth Plague: Cattle Murrain (9:1 – 7)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh and say to him,'This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says:"Let my people go, so that they may worship me." [2]If you refuse to let them go and continue to hold them back, [3]the hand of the LORD will bring a terrible plague on your livestock in the field — on your horses and donkeys and camels and on your cattle and sheep and goats. [4]But the LORD will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt, so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.' "

[5]The LORD set a time and said, "Tomorrow the LORD will do this in the land." [6]And the next day the LORD did it: All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. [7]Pharaoh sent men to investigate and found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died. Yet his heart was unyielding and he would not let the people go.

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 The fifth plague is patterned after the second: Moses must go to Pharaoh's palace and announce the next pestilence (v.1). A "terrible plague" (v.3) will be brought, not by God's "finger," as the Egyptian magicians put it in 8:19, but by his "hand" (v.3). It will fall on all the cattle in the field. There is no need to press the expression "all the livestock" (v.6) to mean each and every animal and then find there are no Egyptian cattle left for the seventh plague

(vv.19, 25), for it is already plain in v.3 that the plague affects only those cattle "in the field." Normally Egyptian cattle were stabled from May through December, during the flood and the drying-off periods when the pastures were waterlogged. Thus some of the cattle are already being turned out to pasture in the south; so it must be sometime in the month of January. These cattle are then affected when they come into contact with the heaps of dead frogs left from the second plague and died of *Bacillus Anthracis*, the hoof and mouth disease.

Israelite cattle are exempted from the plague possibly because the delta would be slower in recovering from the effects of the flood, which occurs further downstream. Also, the Israelites' different attitude toward corpses — they took precautions to deal with dead carcasses — may have spared their own cattle. Rawlinson, 1:199, suggests that the miraculous nature of this plague can be seen in (1) the announcement and timing of the pestilence (vv.3 – 6), (2) the severity of its effect (v.6), and (3) the selectivity of its impact on the Egyptians' cattle only (v.7). This is the second plague in which God distinguishes between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

5 – 7 The interval between the announcement and the morrow (v.5), when the fifth plague is to take effect, will allow time for a believing response from Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Presumably some believe and attempt to rescue their animals by bringing them in from the fields. Others purposely delay turning their cattle out to pasture.

When Pharaoh hears that all the Israelite cattle have miraculously escaped the cattle plague, he sends envoys to Goshen to investigate (v.7). The rumor is true: "Not one animal belonging to the Israelites died" (v.6). Pharaoh probably has his own explanations and rationalizations, for his position and heart again become resolute and unyielding.

Meanwhile, another part of Egypt's wide array of gods is hard hit: the Apis, or sacred bull Ptah; the calf god Ra; the cows of Hathor; the jackal-headed god Anubis; and the bull Bakis of the god Mentu. The evidence is too strong to be mere coincidence: (1) the time has been set by Yahweh, the God of the Hebrews (v.5); (2) a "distinction" is made between the cattle of the two peoples (v.4); and (3) the results are total — all Egyptian cattle "in the field" (v.3) die, but not one head of Israelite livestock perishes.

NOTES

3 G. S. Ogden ("Notes on the Use of הויה in Exodus IX. 3," *VT* 17 [1967]: 483 – 84) asks why the participle of *hyh* occurs here — הֹוָיָה (*hôyâ*, "[The hand of the LORD] will bring") — and no other time in the OT when one would expect an imperfect or a nominal clause without a verb. His totally satisfactory answer is: (1) the use of the participle plus *hinnēh* lends itself to denoting an impending divine action, and (2) it conforms to a pattern in which the participle is used five times in Moses' and Aaron's petition for an Israelite pilgrimage, when they threaten Pharaoh with what God will do should Pharaoh fail to comply (7:17; 8:2; 9:3, 14; 10:4). Thus the participial form is "manufactured" to conform to this pattern.

See Notes on 8:2 for דֶּבֶר (*deber*, "plague, pestilence").The word occurs in some fifty places either of the Lord's judgment on a people (e.g., Lev 26:25; Nu 14:12; 2Sa 24:13 – 15) or as that from which the Lord is able to save his own (Ps 91:3).

Ever since W. F. Albright's remark (*Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* [Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1942], 96) that it was only in "the eleventh century [BC] that camel-riding nomads first appear in our documentary sources," it has been customary to regard verses such as Genesis 12:16 (Abraham's camels in Egypt), 37:25 (an Ishmaelite camel caravan headed for Egypt), and here — בַּגְּמַלִּים (*baggᵉmallîm*, "on the camels") — as being anachronistic. Cassuto, 111, however, affirms that domesticated camels were in Egypt during Moses' time even though no scholarly agreement exists on the time of their original domestication (see also Kitchen, "Camel," *NBD*, 181 – 83).

4 On וְהִפְלָה (*wᵉhiplâ*, "a distinction"), see Notes on 8:22 and 8:23.

7. Sixth Plague: Boils (9:8 – 12)

[8]Then the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Take handfuls of soot from

a furnace and have Moses toss it into the air in the presence of Pharaoh. [9]It will become fine dust over the whole land of Egypt, and festering boils will break out on men and animals throughout the land."

[10]So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. [11]The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians. [12]But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

COMMENTARY

8 – 9 Like the third plague, this one, which completes the second cycle, is sent unannounced. For the first time the lives of humans are attacked and endangered; thus, it is a foreshadowing of the tenth and most dreadful of all the plagues. With a touch of divine irony and poetic justice, Moses and Aaron are each to take two handfuls (the form is dual) of soot from a lime kiln or brick-making furnace, the symbol of Israel's bondage (v.8; see 1:14; 5:7 – 19). The soot is likely placed in a container and carried to Pharaoh's presence, where Moses tosses it into the air. This act is a symbolic action much like those of the latter prophets (e.g., Jeremiah's smashing of the pottery jar in Jer 19 or Ezekiel's siege preparations and prophetically symbolic actions in Eze 4 – 5). There was also a logical connection between the soot created by the sweat of God's enslaved people and the judgment that is to afflict the bodies of the enslavers.

10 – 12 When the soot is tossed skyward, festering boils break out on all the Egyptians and their animals (vv.9 – 10). Attempts to identify this malady have produced various results (see Notes).

In a humorous aside, v.11 notes that the magicians (who bowed out in plague three and are unnoticed, though possibly present, in plagues four and five) literally (and vocationally) "could not stand" before Moses. The same can be said for all the Egyptians. Here for the first time God hardens Pharaoh's heart (v.12) — a seconding, as it were, of his own motion made in each of the preceding five plagues.

NOTES

8 פִּיחַ (*pîaḥ*) is “soot,” not “ashes” taken from sacrifices, which are called אֵפֶר (*ʾēper*; cf. Nu 19:10). This *hapax legomenon* is from the verb פּוּחַ (*pûaḥ*, “to breathe, blow”).

כִּבְשָׁן (*kibšān*, “furnace”) appears four times in the Bible: Genesis 19:28 as a simile for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Exodus 19:18 as a simile for the theophany on Mount Sinai, and here in vv.8 and 10. Cook, 490, lists the Egyptian and Coptic word *kabusa*, meaning “anthrax” or “carbo.” Four other Hebrew words are used elsewhere in the OT for ovens or furnaces. That these kilns were used to make bricks along with the more usual sun-dried bricks is attested in the New Kingdom period.

9 – 10 שְׁחִין (*šᵊḥîn*, “boils”) has an Arabic cognate that means “to be hot.” This sickness is associated with Job (Job 2:7 – 8) and Hezekiah (2Ki 20:7; Isa 38:21) and with various skin diseases (Lev 13:18 – 23).

אֲבַעְבֻּעֹת (*ʾᵃbaʿbuʿōt*, “blisters, pustules”; NIV,“festering”) is from an assumed verb *bu*< (“to swell up”); but Cook, 490, points to the Egyptian *b*<*b*< (“to drink”), which in Coptic means “to overflow.”The initial *aleph* in the Hebrew spelling is no special problem. Notice the slight difference in the expressions between v.9 and v.10 (lit. tr.): “Boils breaking out in pustules” (v.9) and “boils of pustules breaking out” (v.10).

Various suggestions for the malady are (1) smallpox (Cassuto), (2) Nile blisters similar to scarlet fever (Keil and Delitzsch), (3) skin anthrax (Hort, 101 – 3), and (4) inflammations or blains that become malignant ulcers (Bush, Greenberg). We side with Hort, since Deuteronomy 28:35 limits this plague principally to the lower extremities of the body — on the knees and legs. Furthermore, the black soot is especially suited, for anthrax (cf. anthracite coal) is a sort of black, burning abscess often occurring with cattle murrain.

The flies of the fourth plague (*Stomoxys Calcitrans*) have generally been blamed as the carriers of the anthrax spores, but they are totally removed at the conclusion of that plague. Presumably this is another generation of flies (another

batch can come in twenty-seven to thirty-seven days). After animals or humans are bitten on the legs by these flies, a small bluish-red pustule with a central depression in the middle of the swelling appears after two or three days. The center of the boil dries up only to have new boils swell up, and the skin festers as though it has been burnt and then peels off (Hort, 101).

8. Seventh Plague: Hail (9:13 – 35)

13 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront
Pharaoh and say to him, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews,
says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, 14 or this time I will
send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and
your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth.
15 For by now I could have stretched out my hand and struck you and your
people with a plague that would have wiped you off the earth. 16 But I have
raised you up for this very purpose, that I might show you my power and
that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth. 17 You still set yourself
against my people and will not let them go. 18 Therefore, at this time
tomorrow I will send the worst hailstorm that has ever fallen on Egypt,
from the day it was founded till now. 19 Give an order now to bring your
livestock and everything you have in the field to a place of shelter, because
the hail will fall on every man and animal that has not been brought in and
is still out in the field, and they will die.’”

20 Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to
bring their slaves and their livestock inside. 21 But those who ignored the
word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the field.

22 Then the LORD said to Moses,“Stretch out your hand toward the sky
so that hail will fall all over Egypt — on men and animals and on
everything growing in the fields of Egypt.” 23 When Moses stretched out his
staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed
down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; 24 hail
fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the
land of Egypt since it had become a nation. 25 Throughout Egypt hail struck
everything in the fields —both men and animals; it beat down everything
growing in the fields and stripped every tree. 26 The only place it did not hail

was the land of Goshen, where the Israelites were.

[27]Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. “This time I have sinned,” he said to them. “The LORD is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong. [28]Pray to the LORD, for we have had enough thunder and hail. I will let you go; you don’t have to stay any longer.”

[29]Moses replied, “When I have gone out of the city, I will spread out my hands in prayer to the LORD. The thunder will stop and there will be no more hail, so you may know that the earth is the LORD’s. [30]But I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God.”

[31](The fl ax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the fl ax was in bloom. [32]The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later.)

[33]Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land.

[34]When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. [35]So Pharaoh’s heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.

COMMENTARY

13 – 19 As in the first (7:15) and fourth (8:20) plagues, Moses is to begin this third cycle of plagues by rising early in the morning to confront Pharaoh with the Lord’s message (v.13). From these early days in February until the time of the tenth and climactic plague, Pharaoh will spend approximately eight of the most dreadful weeks he has ever known.

To underscore further the theological significance of these weeks and their events, God prompts Moses to preface his latest announcement of divine judgment with a long message filled with doctrinal instruction. This unprecedented message is calculated to move Pharaoh and his subjects from rebellion to belief in Israel’s God. Its ominous contents include the following:

1. An announcement that God will vent the “full force” (v.14; i.e., “all the remaining plagues”; cf. 29:12 with Greenberg, 160) of the plagues on

Egypt so that no one will doubt that there is anyone like this God in all the earth.

2. A reminder that previous pestilences and plagues may well have swept both king and people off the face of the earth had not God deliberately and purposely spared them for one important reason: that his power and name might be heralded throughout the earth by means of Pharaoh's stupidity (vv.15 – 16).
3. A declaration that in denying the release of Israel, Pharaoh has acted as an obstructionist against Almighty God himself (v.17).
4. A threat that Egypt will experience the worst hailstorm it has ever seen in its history (v.18).
5. An extraordinary feature that provides for those Egyptians who believe Moses' words are a means of escape from the effects of the storm (v.19).

The seventh plague will be judgment with the expectation that it may result in the blessing of belief and trust. Had not Abraham been given this mission to be a means of blessing to "all peoples on earth" (Ge 12:3)? And has not the theme "that the Egyptians might know that I am the LORD" (or slight variations) appeared frequently in the midst of these plagues (7:5; 8:10; 9:14, 16, 29 – 30; cf. also 14:4, 18)? Moses will sigh over Israel (Nu 14:11), "How long will these people treat me with contempt? How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?" The same words apply here.

The months of leniency are almost over. Now the full blast of the ensuing plagues will penetrate directly to Pharaoh's "heart" (v.14; NIV, "against you"). The "heart" (*lēb*; GK 4213) does not signify "his person," as *nepeš* (GK 5883) can (Keil and Delitzsch, 1:489); rather, it refers to his inner being, nature, and seared conscience. His pride and arrogance will be tossed to the wind as the terrors of these new plagues force him in perplexed and desperate sorrow of soul literally to beg the Israelites to leave his presence immediately.

Yet Pharaoh is no mere pawn to be toyed with at will, for the object is that he too may come to experience personally and believe ("know") the incomparability of God's person and greatness. The superlative rating of his deeds (untr. in NIV) —none "like it" (*kāmōhû*, of the hailstorm in vv.18, 24; of the locusts in 10:6) — should lead the king and his people to the identical rating of God's person (*no one* "like you," *kāmōkā*, 15:11; *kāmōnî*, "like me," 9:14).

20 – 26 Rainfall comes only occasionally in Upper Egypt; thus, the prediction of a severe hailstorm accompanied by a violent electrical storm is probably greeted with much skepticism. Only the delta receives on an average about ten inches of rainfall per year, while Upper Egypt has one inch or, more often, none. But some fear "the word of the LORD" (v.20) and act accordingly. This is belief as it should be, resulting in appropriate action based on confidence in God's word. Some Egyptians receive Moses' words as being from God himself, for they become a part of that mixed company of Gentile believers who leave Egypt with Israel (see 12:38).

In the three plagues of the third cycle (9:10; 10:13, 20), Moses apparently loses his shyness and diffidence, for he is the one who now stretches forth his staff and his hand (v.22; cf. Aaron's leading role in the first three plagues: 7:19 – 20; 8:6, 17). Hail joined by unannounced thunder and balls of fire (see Notes) that run along the ground (v.23) provide Egypt with the most spectacular display in her history (see Notes on vv.18, 23, 24).

The destruction is devastating. Five times in vv.24 – 25 the word *kol* ("all, everything") is used; yet it is used hyperbolically and not literally, because the first two occurrences of *kol* ("in all Egypt," vv.24 – 25a; NIV, "throughout Egypt") are immediately qualified in v.26 to exempt the land of Goshen, where the Hebrews live. Nevertheless, even though the storm does not take every single tree, herb, or creature in the field, it is tragic enough to impress even the most calloused individual.

27 – 30 Pharaoh, obviously shaken, concedes the point: "I have sinned," he admits, though he includes the face-saving qualifier "this time." The question is, however, what makes this plague any different than the rest — except its severity. Only when the Lord begins to hurt Pharaoh does he (momentarily) seek him (cf. Ps 78:34). Like Jeremiah (Jer 12:1), Pharaoh declared that Yahweh (not Elohim!) is in the right and that he and his people are in the wrong! Indeed! But has not Pharaoh been reduced to plea-bargaining with Moses and Aaron twice before (8:8, 25 – 28)?

Moses' reply is simple, confident, and noble. He will spread out his hands in prayer (a gesture of request and appeal to God) once he is back in the country

with his own people, and the hail and thunder will stop — to prove once again (in this repeated apologetic and evangelistic refrain) that the whole earth belongs to the LORD. “But,” Moses adds, “I know that you and your officials still do not fear the LORD God” (v.30; an unusual combination of divine names [Yahweh-Elohim] seen only here and in seven other places in the OT besides in Ge 2 and 3; see D. F. Kidner, “Distribution of Divine Names in Jonah,” *TynBul* 21 [1970]: 126 – 28, for its use in Jnh 4:6, another Gentile context).

31 – 35 Even though most commentators complain about either the location of the parenthetical note in vv.31 – 32 (most prefer it to appear after v.25) or its alleged artless midrashic attempt to explain and harmonize later plagues with the extent of the destruction here, we find it most conveniently located. The integrity of the seasonal observation confirms the order in this text, if the narrative is taken on its own terms and allowed to be innocent until proven guilty. Accordingly, before Moses prays for the hail to cease, he has sufficient time to tell the reader just how extensive the damage has been.

Furthermore, since in Egypt flax is usually sown in the beginning of January and is in flower three weeks later, while barley is sown in August and is harvested in February, both would be exceedingly vulnerable if this plague occurred in the beginning or middle of February (probably a little later than usual with a high Nile year). Wheat and spelt (see Notes) are also sown in August but are not ready for harvest until the end of March.

That Goshen is unaffected by this storm matches the agricultural observations, for the Mediterranean temperate zone has these storms only in late spring and early autumn, but not from November to March (Hort, 48 – 49). Flax is used for linen garments. The vicinity of Tanis was ideal for producing it. Barley is used in the manufacture of beer (a common Egyptian drink), as horse feed, and for bread by the poorer classes.

After Moses’ prayer is answered, Pharaoh once again rescinds his offer and forgets all about his confession of sin and wrong.

NOTES

13 – 14 More than wordplay can be found in the divine demand,“*Release* my people . . . or I will *release* all my plagues [on you]” (NIV, “Let my people go . . . or .. . I will send”). In both instances the verb is שׁלח (*šlḥ*).

14 For כָּל־מַגֵּפֹתַי (*kol-maggēppōtay*, lit., “all my plagues”) the NIV has, “the full force of my plagues.” See Notes on 8:2.

אֶל־לִבֶּךָ (*ʾel-libbᵉkā*, “against you”) is literally, “at [or] into your heart.” There is no need to emend the text to אֵלֶּה בְּךָ (*ʾēlleh bᵉkā*, “all these . . . on you”) with Hyatt, 118, for as Childs, 129, says, “The MT is clear enough.” The NEB renders it, “[I will] strike home.”

17 מִסְתּוֹלֵל (*mistôlēl*) is a Hithpael participle from the root *sll*, which means “to raise up a mound or bank, to obstruct”; hence the reflexive idea of the stem is, “to elevate oneself [so as] to be an obstructionist” (NIV,“set yourself ”). For an illustration of ב (*b*) used in the sense of “against,” as here — בְּעַמִּי (*bᵉʿammî*, “against my people”), Cassuto points to Micah 7:6.

18 הִוָּסְדָה (*hiwwāsᵉdâ*, “[from the day Egypt] was founded”) is a rare form of the Niphal perfect. B. Couroyer (“Un eagyptianisme biblique: ‘depuis la fondation de l’Egypte,’” *RB* 67 [1960]: 42 – 48) finds evidence for declaring that this phrase is a common Egyptian expression (cf. Cassuto, 117), though the Hebrew *yāsad* (“to found”) would correspond to the Egyptian *grg*.

21 לֹא שָׂם לִבּוֹ (*lōʾ-šām libbô*, “[those who] ignored [the word]”) is literally, “did not set his heart [to the word].” See Notes on 7:23. Observe the singular again.

23 נָתַן קֹלֹת (*nātan qōlōt*, “give voice”) is a frequent Hebrew expression for the idea, “to thunder.” It is also called the “voices of God” in v.28 (cf. 19:16; 20:18; 2Sa 22:14; Job 28:26; 38:25; Ps 29:3 – 9). Notice the figure of speech called *zeugma*, in which two objects (“voice [= ‘thunder’] and hail”) are linked to the one Hebrew verb “give” (= “sent”), but only the first goes naturally with the verb.

וַתִּתְהַלֶּךְ אֵשׁ אַרְצָה (*wattihᵉlak ʾēšʾārᵉṣâ*, lit.,' lit.,“and fire ran along the ground”) is rendered by the NIV,“lightning flashed down to the ground,” which is weaker. Notice the archaic form of the verb for the usual *wattēlēk*.

24 אֵשׁ מִתְלַקַּחַת (*ʾēš mitlaqqaḥat* lit., “fire taking hold of itself,” i.e., zigzagging back and forth as though it were trying to grab itself) is clearly retranslated by the NIV as, “the lightning flashed back and forth.” See the exact phrase in Ezekiel 1:4, which also describes a storm.

26 On Goshen, see Notes on 8:22; cf. also Genesis 45:10 – 47:6.

32 The word כֻּסֶּמֶת (*kussemet*, “spelt” [?]) occurs only here and in Isaiah 28:25 and Ezekiel 4:9. This may be emmer, which is known from Egyptian tombs while spelt is not. See Cook, 490, for Egyptian *smw* (“herbs”) used in the Coptic version of v.25 and for a kind of Egyptian grain spelled *kmtt*, *kmdt*, or *kwt*. Rawlinson, 220, calls it *doora*, a crop sown in late autumn as an after-crop, which ripens at about the time wheat does.

9. Eighth Plague: Locusts (10:1 – 20)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his officials so that I may perform these miraculous signs of mine among them [2]that you may tell your children and grandchildren how I dealt harshly with the Egyptians and how I performed my signs among them, and that you may know that I am the LORD.”

[3]So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and said to him,“This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: ‘How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, so that they may worship me. [4]If you refuse to let them go, I will bring locusts into your country tomorrow. [5]They will cover the face of the ground so that it cannot be seen. They will devour what little you have left after the hail, including every tree that is growing in your fields. [6]They will fill your houses and those of all your officials and all the Egyptians — something neither your fathers nor your forefathers have ever seen from the day they settled in this land till now.’ ” Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.

[7]Pharaoh’s officials said to him, “How long will this man be a snare to us? Let the people go, so that they may worship the LORD their God. Do you not yet realize that Egypt is ruined?”

[8]Then Moses and Aaron were brought back to Pharaoh. “Go, worship the
LORD your God,” he said. “But just who will be going?”

[9]Moses answered, “We will go with our young and old, with our sons and
daughters, and with our flocks and herds, because we are to celebrate a
festival to the LORD.”

[10]Pharaoh said, “The LORD be with you — if I let you go, along with
your women and children! Clearly you are bent on evil. [11]No! Have only
the men go; and worship the LORD, since that’s what you have been asking
for.” Then Moses and Aaron were driven out of Pharaoh’s presence.

[12]And the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over Egypt so
that locusts will swarm over the land and devour everything growing in the
fields, everything left by the hail.”

[13]So Moses stretched out his staff over Egypt, and the LORD made an
east wind blow across the land all that day and all that night. By morning
the wind had brought the locusts; 14they invaded all Egypt and settled
down in every area of the country in great numbers. Never before had there
been such a plague of locusts, nor will there ever be again. [15]They covered
all the ground until it was black. They devoured all that was left after the
hail — everything growing in the fields and the fruit on the trees. Nothing
green remained on tree or plant in all the land of Egypt.

[16]Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “I have sinned
against the LORD your God and against you. [17]Now forgive my sin once
more and pray to the LORD your God to take this deadly plague away from
me.”

[18]Moses then left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. [19]And the LORD
changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts
and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt.
[20]But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the
Israelites go.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 For the first time we are told that Egypt’s officials are also as obstinate as Pharaoh; therefore the Lord (the pronoun “I” being repeated in Hebrew for emphasis) has hardened them all (v.1). But Moses must find a lesson in this divine work of hardening. There follows, then, another theological preface to the

eighth plague (vv.1 – 2), just as Pharaoh was served in 9:14 – 16 with a similar lesson prior to the seventh plague. The lesson for Israel is twofold: (1) to educate succeeding generations in how the Lord "makes sport" (see Notes) of the Egyptians and performs his miracles in their land, and (2) thereby to bring Israel to faith in the Lord. Evidence for this recital of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt can be seen in Psalms 77:11 – 20; 78:43 – 53; 105:26 – 38; 106:7 – 12; 114: 1 – 3; 135:8 – 9; 136:10 – 15 (see also Dt 4:9).

3 – 6 Moses proceeds to the palace, as is his custom in the second plague of each of the three cycles, and announces to Pharaoh the next plague (vv.3 – 4). The message begins with a question: "How long will you refuse to humble yourself before [the LORD]?" Pharaoh's act of self-condemnation and abject humility in 9:27 is just that — an act. But here is the consummate question of all questions that God finally raises against all obstinate sinners: "How long?"

The demand for Israel's release is again laid down along with a time lag providing ample opportunity for reflection and repentance: "tomorrow" (v.4; cf. 8:10, 15, 21; 9:5 – 6, 18). Moses informs Pharaoh that God will "bring locusts into your country" (Joel 2:25 calls locusts God's "great army"). They will finish off every living green thing, leaving destruction in their wake (v.5). It will exceed any locust invasion Egypt has ever known (v.6). With that Moses and Aaron turn their backs on Pharaoh (an amazing gesture for normal protocol) and stalk out.

7 – 11 Pharaoh's officials — till now, silent observers in this contest of wills — pick up Moses' "How long?" (v.3) with a "How long?" of their own: "How long will this man [*zeh*, 'this (man),' not *zo't*, 'this (situation)'] be a snare to us?" (v.7). Out of loyalty to their king and country they blame Moses; but it is obvious that they are beginning to become impatient with Pharaoh's intransigence. Cannot Pharaoh see the "snare" this man is setting for them, and does Pharaoh not realize that Egypt is nearly ruined? How long, indeed, can all this continue? Someone has to give in. They urge Pharaoh to yield: "Let the people [*hā'ănāšîm*, 'the men' in the generic sense] go."

In another first, Pharaoh asks Moses and Aaron to return to the palace for some negotiations related to the imminent pestilence (v.8). Clearly as a sop to his frightened officials, Pharaoh halfheartedly gives Moses his permission to take

Israel to sacrifice in the desert. However, he coyly asks (as though he does not remember Moses' original request or the advice just given him by his own officials), "Just who will be going [on this religious trip]?" Moses responds out of a position of strength: "We all are going to celebrate this festival to the LORD" (cf. v.9). "Oh no you're not," is Pharaoh's decisive rejoinder (cf. v.10). You take only your "men" (*haggᵉbarim*, lit., "strong men," v.11); that will be enough for religious purposes. It is true, of course, that later Israel required only males to attend the three yearly festivals (23:17; 34:23; Dt 16:16), but the artificiality of this limitation at this time is evident from Herodotus's note (2.60) that the women accompanied the men at Egyptian religious festivals.

The contempt Pharaoh feels for Moses' request and for Yahweh himself can be seen in his biting sarcasm and veiled threat of v.10: "The LORD be with you [i.e., 'May God help you'] — if I let you go, along with your women and children!" To Pharaoh it is plain that Moses and his people are up to no good. Cassuto, 125, believes that all this talk about a three-day journey is just a lot of diplomatic bargaining in which each side knows what the other wants without ever explicitly declaring it. Pharaoh does not yield to this moderate first-step request for fear of what is to be (though unknown at the time to him) the ultimate request (see comment on 3:18b). Moses and Aaron are then insulted by being chased from the premises — another in a string of wicked firsts.

12 – 15 So the plague is ordered to begin as Moses again (see comment on 9:22) stretches out his hand and staff over Egypt (v.12). Swarms of locusts (see Hort, 48 – 52) from the bumper crop produced because of the exceedingly wet summer in Ethiopia (which also caused the unusually high Nile) is swept away from natural breeding grounds around Port Susa and Jidda (on the west side of the Red Sea across from the Arabian Peninsula) by an east wind that blows all day and all night (v.13; cf. 14:21).

Thus these locusts (now ready to migrate in February or March after hatching during the winter from the eggs laid in September) are driven into Egypt by a sirocco (a hot wind) from the Arabian Peninsula, instead of into Canaan had the winds been from the southwest. They come in droves (v.14, lit., "exceedingly heavy," as in 9:3, 18). They finish off everything the hail left (v.15).

16 – 20 Hastily Pharaoh summons Moses and Aaron and, without any

qualifications as in 9:27 – 28, confesses his sin against Yahweh their God and against these men (v.16). But he still insists on having the upper hand. “Now,” he adds, as though to organize Moses’ conclusion, “forgive [*śā*ʾ, singular] my sin once more [*ʾak happaʿam*, i.e., this one more time]” (v.17). He pretends that this is it. No more will he change his mind, no more tricks! Just ask your God, he pleads, “(only) [*raq*, untr. in NIV] to take this deadly plague away from me.”

Once again God graciously answers Moses’ prayer (v.18). He sends a strong “sea breeze” (*rûaḥyam*), which for people living in Canaan would have been a “west wind” but for those in Egypt was a wind from the north or northwest, that drove the locusts into the Reed Sea.

NOTES

2 הִתְעַלַּלְתִּי (*hitʿallaltî*, “I dealt harshly”) describes an action that brings shame and disgrace on its object. It is used anthropomorphically of Yahweh’s treatment of the Egyptians when he “made toys of ” them or even “made fools out of them” (my tr.; cf. 1Sa 6:6). These negative connotations are brought out with Balaam in Numbers 22:29, the Levite’s concubine in Judges 19:25, and Saul’s fear of the Philistines’ final action in 1 Sam uel 31:4.

4 אַרְבֶּה (*ʾarbeh*, “locusts”) is from the root *rbh* (“to be numerous, many, multiplied”). The use of the collective singular for the plural is again noteworthy. For other names for locusts, see Joel 1:4. The species intended here is either the *Acridium Peregrinum* or the *Oedipoda Migratoria* — neither being a stranger to Arabia, Egypt, or Canaan.

5 עֵין הָאָרֶץ (*ʿên hāʾāreṣ*, lit., “the eye of the ground”) is rendered “the face of the ground” by the NIV. “Surface of the ground” destroys the figure of speech called metonymy, where a faculty is put for an object; here, the sight or visibility of the ground will be hidden by the prodigious numbers of locusts (Bush, 1:122).

6 On מִיּוֹם הֱיוֹתָם (*miyyôm hĕyôtām*, “from the day they settled”), see the Notes on 9:18. On the idiom, “till now” (עַד הַיּוֹם, *ʿad hayyôm*, lit., “until the day”), see B. S. Childs, “A Study of the Formula, ‘Until this Day,’” *JBL* 82 (1963): 279.

8 מִי וָמִי הַהֹלְכִים (*mî wāmî hahōlᵉkîm,* "just who will be going?") is literally, "Who and who [are] the ones going?" The repetition of the interrogative pronouns may be for emphasis, but the expression appears idiomatic, though it occurs only here.

10 On טַף (*ṭāp,* "women and children"), see Notes on 10:24.

14 On כָּמֹהוּ ... כֵּן (*kēn ... kāmōhû,* lit., "such [a plague of locusts] as it"), see on 9:14 and 18. See Labuschagne, 14, for formulas of incomparability.

15 The repetition of "all" in this passage may be similar to that in 9:24 – 25; see comment there.

10. Ninth Plague: Darkness (10:21 – 29)

[21]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that darkness will spread over Egypt — darkness that can be felt." [22]So Moses stretched out his hand toward the sky, and total darkness covered all Egypt for three days. [23]No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days. Yet all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived.

[24]Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and said, "Go, worship the LORD. Even your women and children may go with you; only leave your flocks and herds behind."

[25]But Moses said, "You must allow us to have sacrifices and burnt offerings to present to the LORD our God. [26]Our livestock too must go with us; not a hoof is to be left behind. We have to use some of them in worshiping the LORD our God, and until we get there we will not know what we are to use to worship the LORD."

[27]But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go.

[28]Pharaoh said to Moses, "Get out of my sight! Make sure you do not appear before me again! The day you see my face you will die."

[29]"Just as you say," Moses replied, "I will never appear before you again."

COMMENTARY

21 – 23 Unannounced, like the third and sixth plagues, the ninth plague comes in the month of March as Moses once again stretches out his hand (v.21; cf. 9:22; 10:12). No doubt God uses the yearly phenomenon known as the *khamsin*, meaning the "fifty"-day wind that blows off the Sahara Desert from the south and southwest usually at about the time of the vernal equinox. During two or three of those days the wind blows with great force and picks up sand and dust. Given the unusually high Nile with the red dirt it has spilled over everything and the now barren and baked fields after the hail and locusts have destroyed all the vegetation that would hold the soil in its place, this is no ordinary *khamsin*. The polluted air got so thick — "no one could see anyone" (v.23) — that the sun itself is blotted out for "three days" (v.22). Israel, meanwhile, is somewhat protected by the hills on the south side of the Wadi Tumilat and by the fact that the red silt has not dried out as much, since their fields are later in clearing the effects of the flood (Hort, 52 – 54).

24 – 29 Pharaoh decides to compromise further: Hebrew families can attend this festival celebration, but they must leave behind their flocks and herds (v.24). But Moses yields nothing."Not a hoof is to be left," he affirms in a fine hyperbole rising to proverbial status,"for we have to use some of them in worshiping the LORD" (vv.25 – 26). The festival is brand new, and it is as yet unannounced, explains Moses.

But Pharaoh has had enough. Rudely he demands that they leave and never darken his presence again on penalty of death. But does he think that will prevent further disasters? Have not plagues three, six, and nine come without warning? Is it not strange for him to be threatening Moses with death when the smell of death is all over his court and Egypt? As Bush, 1:30, has said, "It is a sad farewell when God, in the persons of his servants, refuses anymore to see the face of the wicked."

NOTES

21 וְיָמֵשׁ (*wᵉyāmēš*, "can be felt") is from the root *mûš*, which means "to feel, grasp" with the hands (Ps 115:7). It is used of Samson's hands on the pillars in Judges

16:26. Here the darkness is so great that it can be touched.

22 חֹשֶׁךְ־אֹפֶל (*ḥōšek-ʾpēlâ*, "total darkness") is an intensive expression that literally means "darkness of obscurity." The LXX strings three Greek words together: two for "darkness" (*skotos gnophos*) and a third (*thyella*) for "storm"; therefore Hyatt, 127, suggests that the LXX translator may have been the first commentator to associate this darkness with the *khamsin*.

24 טַפְּכֶם (*ṭappʾkem*) is "your women and children." *T.ap* (lit., "little ones") means only the children when women are mentioned separately (Ge 34:29; 45:19; 46:5), but at other times it means "women and children" (Ge 43:8; 47:12; Ex 10:10).

24 – 26 Moses matches Pharaoh's generous גַּם (*gam*, "even, also"), allowing the children to accompany the worshipers, with two of his own in vv.25 and 26. In the phrase גַּם־אַתָּה תִּתֵּן בְּיָדֵנוּ (*gam-ʾattâ tittēnbʾyādēnû*, "You must allow us [to have sacrifices]"), many commentators think that Moses makes a new impudent request that Pharaoh donate his animals for this sacrifice, but this makes no sense contextually. Nor does Moses specify their animals. The phrase is either as the NIV has it, "You must allow us," or as Hyatt, 127, paraphrases it, "*You* would have to provide us with sacrifices . . . if we did not take along our own livestock" (see 3:18; 5:1 – 3; 8:25 – 28).

11. Tenth Plague: Death of the Firstborn (11:1 – 10)

[1]Now the LORD had said to Moses, "I will bring one more plague on
Pharaoh and on Egypt. After that, he will let you go from here, and when he
does, he will drive you out completely. [2]Tell the people that men and
women alike are to ask their neighbors for articles of silver and gold."
[3](The LORD made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people,
and Moses himself was highly regarded in Egypt by Pharaoh's officials and
by the people.)

[4]So Moses said, "This is what the LORD says: 'About midnight I will go
throughout Egypt. [5]Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn
son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl,

who is at her hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. [6]There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt — worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. [7]But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.' Then you will know that the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. [8]All these officials of yours will come to me, bowing down before me and saying, 'Go, you and all the people who follow you!' After that I will leave." Then Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh.

[9]The LORD had said to Moses,"Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you — so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt." [10]Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 These verses are parenthetical, for Moses has one last message to communicate to Pharaoh before he leaves his presence after the ninth plague in 10:29, and thus he knows that Pharaoh has "spoken correctly" (cf. 10:28) in halting any further audiences. Even though Hebrew does not have a pluperfect tense, its penchant for simply placing side by side events that we would have subordinated in time (Keil and Delitzsch, 1:87, 499; cf. Ge 2:19; Jdg 2:6; 1Ki 7:13) suggests that it is best to translate v.1 thus: "Now the Lord *had* said" (*wayyō'mer*; cf. NIV).

Thus before Moses goes in to see Pharaoh concerning the ninth plague, God informs Moses that this contest is about to end abruptly. One more plague and Pharaoh will send Israel away, "in the manner of [*k*] one's sending away a slave girl who had been promised to be one's daughter-in-law" (*kāllāh*; see Notes), i.e., showered with gifts on her release from slavery. This interpretation leads easily and naturally into their requests of the Egyptians for gold and silver articles (v.2; see comment on 3:22).

The reasons for the extraordinary generosity of the Egyptians are: (1)Yahweh has made them "favorably disposed" (*nātan ḥēn*, lit., "gave grace") toward Israel (cf. Ps 106:46), and (2) "Moses himself [*hā'îš Mōšeh*, lit., 'the man Moses'] was highly regarded [*gādôl mĕ'ōd*]." There is no need to regard this second reason as an interpolation, a post-Mosaic addition (as perhaps Nu 12:3), or as a piece of

prideful indulgence in self-glorification. The greatness of the man is not because of his personal qualifications but because of the esteem he has accumulated from the magicians (8:18 – 19), the court officials (9:20; 10:7), and Pharaoh himself (9:27; 10:16).

4 – 8 Moses' speech to Pharaoh continues the remarks he began in 10:29. Unlike all the other plagues, this time Yahweh himself (notice the emphatic repetition of the pronoun — אֲנִי יֹצֵא, "I, I will go out") will march (יָצָא is often used in military contexts) through the land of Egypt (v.4). There will be no secondary causes or utilizing instruments such as a strong east wind. The firstborn of all Egyptian families — slaves and cattle (v.5) — will die at midnight (the exact day is not specified). An unprecedented outpouring of grief will follow, but among the Israelites there will be such tranquility on that evening that not even a dog will bark (vv.6 – 7)!

A possible historical reminiscence of this event has been uncovered by Mordechai Gilula ("The Smiting of the Firstborn: An Egyptian Myth?" *TA* 4 [1977]: 94 – 95). In the Pre-Mosaic Pyramid Texts (par. 339a – b), there is a reference to "that day of slaying the firstborn," spelled *smsw* in Egyptian. Likewise, the Pre-Mosaic Coffin Texts (VI:178) refer to "that night of slaying the firstborn," while another Coffin Text has both "that night . . . that day of slaying the firstborn" (II:163b – c). In the Coffin Texts the Egyptian word for "firstborn" is *wr* or *wrw*, meaning "great" or "eldest." Interestingly, the firstborn in the Coffin Texts are gods, while the Pyramid Texts do not identify them more specifically.

9 – 10 Therefore, as a recapitulation of all Moses' negotiations beginning in 7:8, readers are reminded that all this takes place as God predicted it. No amount of evidence has persuaded Pharaoh's hard heart, and Israel is still enslaved.

NOTES

1 On נֶגַע (*negaʿ*, "plague"), see Notes on 8:2. The NIV's "And when he does" for כְּשַׁלְּחוֹ כָּלָה (*kᵉšallᵉḥô kālâ*) is probably incorrect. The difficulty of this passage was felt already by the LXX, which paraphrased it, "And whenever he sends you forth with everything." *Syn panti* ("with everything") is inserted because the verb is

transitive. Targum Onqelos and most modern translations render *kālâ* adverbially (Ge 18:21) by “completely” or “altogether.” This, however, requires adding an unwarranted “you” (“when he sends *you* away altogether”), and it yields little sense in the context.

The best solution, I believe, is offered by Reuven Yaron (“On Divorce in Old Testament Times,” *Revue Internationale des Droits de l,Antiquite* 6 [1957]: 122 – 24), who treats *ke* as referring to mode, “in the manner” (not to time, “when”), and the third-person singular possessive pronoun “his,” affixed to “sending,” as denoting an indefinite person, viz., “one’s sending.” He reads *kālâ* as *kālâ* a cognate with the Babylonian *kallatum* (cf. Code of Hammurabi 155, 156; Nuzi Tablet 25 in AASOR X and 30 in AASOR XVI). A Hebrew *kālâ* with a compound meaning of a “slave-girl” brought to be married as one’s “daughter-in-law” would be a *hapax legomenon*, but the Babylonian parallels and the improved meaning of vv.1 – 3 give it serious weight. Thus the text should be translated: “After that, he will let you go from here, in the manner of one’s sending away a *kālâ* [a slave purchased to be one’s daughter-in-law].”

2 On וְיִשְׁאֲלוּ (*wᵉyiš·ʾᵃlû*, “[and they] are to ask”), see comment and Notes on 3:22.

7 On לֹא יֶחֱרַץ־כֶּלֶב לְשֹׁנוֹ (*lōʾ yeḥᵉraṣ-keleb lᵉšōnô*, “not a dog will bark”), see F. C. Fensham, “Remarks on *Keret* 114b – 136a,” *JNSL* 11 (1983): 75, who relates this to the Egyptian (*kāllā*; (“watchdog”). On יִפְלֶה (*yapleh*, “a distinction”), see comment and Notes on 8:22; cf. Notes on 8:23.

9 – 10 On מֹפְתִים (*mōpᵉtîm*, “wonders”), see comment on 4:21.

REFLECTION

In Moses’ final word on the tenth plague, he indicates that the Egyptians, on bended knee, will beg the Israelites to leave those parts immediately (v.8). Moses says, “After that I will leave”(*ʾēṣēʾ*,' “go out” —reechoing the Lord’s “going out” in v.4). But the stupidity and waste of all of those lives just because Pharaoh’s stubborn sinfulness makes Moses exceedingly angry (“Moses, hot with anger, left Pharaoh,” v.8). To be in the presence of evil and yet fail to be angry is a

dreadful spiritual and moral malady.

E. The Passover (12:1 – 28)

1. Preparations for the Passover (12:1 – 13)

[1]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in Egypt, 2"This month is to be for
you the first month, the first month of your year. [3]Tell the whole community
of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for
his family, one for each household. [4]If any household is too small for a
whole lamb, they must share one with their nearest neighbor, having taken
into account the number of people there are. You are to determine the
amount of lamb needed in accordance with what each person will eat. [5]The
animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may
take them from the sheep or the goats. [6]Take care of them until the
fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel
must slaughter them at twilight. [7]Then they are to take some of the blood
and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they
eat the lambs. [8]That same night they are to eat the meat roasted over the
fire, along with bitter herbs, and bread made without yeast. [9]Do not eat the
meat raw or cooked in water, but roast it over the fire — head, legs and
inner parts. [10]Do not leave any of it till morning; if some is left till morning,
you must burn it. [11]This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into
your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in
haste; it is the LORD's Passover.

[12]"On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every
firstborn — both men and animals — and I will bring judgment on all the
gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. [13]The blood will be a sign for you on the
houses where you are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No
destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 The instructions for the feasts of Passover and Unleavened Bread are the only regulations given while Israel is still in Egypt. Thus it seems evident from the phrase "in Egypt" (lit., "in the land of Egypt") that the least one can say is that the contents of ch. 12 are written sometime after the exodus. This event is so

significant that henceforth the religious year will begin (v.2) in the month of Abib (13:4), the month when "the barley had headed" (*,afÊbib* being the Canaanite name for the month; cf. also 23:15; 34:18; Dt 16:1). Later the Babylonian month's name "Nisan" was substituted (Est 3:7), matching our present calendar's designation for late March to the beginning of April (Ne 2:1).

3 – 11 The following instructions, communicated through the elders (see v.21), are given to the "whole community of Israel" (v.3; see Notes).

1. Preparations are to begin on the tenth day of the month of Abib (v.3).
2. The head of each household is to select a *seah* ("lamb, kid"; see v.5) according to the number of people present (v.4).
3. The animal must be a one-year-old male without any defects (v.5; cf. later Lev 22:20 – 25; Mal 1:8, 14).
4. Each animal must be slaughtered at twilight (see Notes) on the fourteenth day (v.6).
5. The blood from the animals is to be applied to the doorframe (see Notes) of each house (v.7).
6. That night each family is to eat the roasted lamb or kid along with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (v.8).
7. The meat must be roasted whole, with the head and legs intact and the washed internals left inside; it must not be eaten raw or boiled in water (v.9).
8. All leftovers are to be burnt; nothing may become profane by putrification or superstitious abuse (v.10; before daybreak, according to 23:18; 34:25; Dt 16:4).
9. The meal must be eaten with an air of haste and expectancy. Therefore, the people's long robes are to be tucked in their belts, their sandals worn, and their staffs ready and on hand (v.11; Dt 16:3).

Thus the whole nation is to be a nation of priests, as Moses later announces in 19:5 – 6 (cf. 1Pe 2:5; Rev 1:6 of the NT believers). The apparent intervention of the Levites in 2 Chron icles 30:17 – 18 and 35:5 – 6 was contrary at least to the original design of the Passover. Here in Exodus we see no priests, no altar, and no tabernacle; families commune in the presence of God and around the sacrificial lamb that is the substitute for each member of that family. The lamb must be a one-year-old male because it is taking the place of Israel's firstborn males, who are young and fresh with the vigor of life. The bitter herbs (lettuce and endive are indigenous to Egypt) recall the bitter years of servitude (1:14),

and the unleavened bread reflects this event's haste. This is the Lord's Passover (see Notes), and this is how Israel is to eat it (v.11).

12 – 13 On that same night, the fifteenth of Abib, the Lord will pass through Egypt and strike down the firstborn of all men and animals whose households have not been believingly placed under the blood of the sacrificial substitute (v.12). This blood is to be a "sign" (*ʾôt*, v.13). Like the other "signs" or "miracles" Pharaoh has seen, this one also is a pledge of God's mercy. The Lord will "pass over" (the verb *pāsaḥ* comes from the same root as the noun *pesah*., "Passover" in v.11) these homes, and no destructive "plague" (*negep*) will affect them.

Indeed, even "all the gods of Egypt" (v.12) will be judged by this last plague. Obviously, those deities whose representatives are linked with beasts are dealt direct blows — the bulls, cows, goats, jackals, lions, baboons, rams, etc. With the sudden death of these sacred representatives, it will undoubtedly be interpreted as a direct blow to the gods of Egypt themselves.

NOTES

3 This is the first occurrence of עֵדָה (*ʿᵃdat*, "community, congregation") in over one hundred usages in the Bible of what becomes a technical term for God's "people" gathered together to worship him or to be instructed in spiritual things. *Qāhāl* ("congregation"), a parallel term preferred by Deuteronomy and many prophetic books, is often associated in meaning with the NT Greek *ekklēsia* ("assembly, church").

5 בֶּן־שָׁנָה (*ben-šānâ*, "year-old") is literally "son of a year." Rabbinic interpretation took this to mean one year old or less. Keil and Delitzsch correctly argue that it must mean a "yearling," since other expressions are available to cover anything prior to that (e.g., Ge 21:4, "son of eight days"; Lev 27:6, "son of a month").

6 Again the collective singular — viz., אֹתוֹ (*ʾōtô*, o, lit., "it"; NIV, "[slaughter] them") — is used for the plural. See also the same pronoun in vv.7, 11 (2x).

בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם (*bên hāʿarbāyim*, lit., "between the two evenings"; NIV, "at twilight") has

given rise to a much discussed question that is explained in two ways: (1) between sunset and dark, or (2) between the decline of the sun (three to five o'clock) and sunset. Deuteronomy 16:6 fixes the time at "when the sun goes down," the same time set for the lighting of the lamps in the tabernacle (Ex 30:8) and the offering of the daily evening sacrifice (29:39). Later custom necessitated moving this time up to allow the Levites to help everyone with their sacrifice.

7 הַמְּזוּזֹת (*hamməzûzōt*, "the sides [of the doorframe]") are easily identified, but הַמַּשְׁקוֹף (*hammašqôp*, "the tops of [the doorframes]") may not be the lintel or top of the doorframe, since it is derived from a root meaning to "look out." It may be the latticed window traditionally placed over the doorway in Egyptian houses and also represented in the facades of tombs (see also vv.22 – 23)."Lintel" seems best, however, until better evidence for the Egyptian model described here is available.

8 מְרֹרִים (*mərōrîm*, "bitter herbs") are wild lettuce or endive.The Mishnah adds four others that may be used: chicory, pepperroot, snakeroot, and dandelion.

9 Meat that was מְבֻשָּׁל בַּמָּיִם (*məbuššāl bammāyim*, "cooked in water, boiled") is forbidden. Deuteronomy 16:7 may appear to contradict Exodus 12:9, but 2 Chronicles 35:13 shows that the verb *bāšal* can mean to "cook" or "bake" as well as "boil"—that is why Moses adds here, "in water." Justin Martyr, in a poor example of spiritualizing exegesis, said that two wooden spits were placed at right angles to each other, thus placing the victim on a type of cross.

11 בְּחִפָּזוֹן (*bəḥippāzôn*, "in haste") is literally "in anxious haste" (cf. Dt 16:3; Isa 52:12). The etymology of פֶּסַח "Passover"; GK 7175) is disputed.Various suggestions include: (1) Hebrew *pāsaḥ*, "to leap, limp, hobble," as Jonathan's lame son in 2 Sam uel 4:4; as between two opinions in 1 Kings 18:21; as in dancing in 1 Kings 18:26; or as a parallel, "to protect, save," in Isaiah 31:5; (2) Akkadian *paššāḫu*,' "to appease, make soft, placate"; (3) Egyptian *p3 sh.3*, "the commemoration," or *p3 3sh*., "the harvest," or *p3šḫ*, "the blow, plague" (see Segal, 95 – 100, for elaborate documentation and analysis). The context (v.13) explains it as a "passing over" the houses of those under the sign of the blood. We cannot address here the long discussion on the prehistory (see ibid., 42 – 46) of this festival; but whatever it may have been, it is here entirely associated with an event in Israel's history.

2. Preparations for the Unleavened Bread (12:14 – 20)

[14]"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come
you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD — a lasting ordinance. [15]For
seven days you are to eat bread made without yeast. On the first day
remove the yeast from your houses, for whoever eats anything with yeast in
it from the first day through the seventh must be cut off from Israel. [16]On
the first day hold a sacred assembly, and another one on the seventh day. Do
no work at all on these days, except to prepare food for everyone to eat —
that is all you may do.

[17]"Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very
day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a
lasting ordinance for the generations to come. [18]In the first month you are
to eat bread made without yeast, from the evening of the fourteenth day
until the evening of the twenty-first day. [19]For seven days no yeast is to be
found in your houses. And whoever eats anything with yeast in it must be
cut off from the community of Israel, whether he is an alien or native-born.
[20]Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened
bread."

COMMENTARY

14 – 16 The connection between the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread is close yet distinct. The OT uses both names to refer to the same feast: "Passover Feast" (Ex 34:25; Eze 45:21), "Feast of Unleavened Bread" (Dt 16:16; 2Ch 30:13, 21; Ezr 6:22). Yet the two rites are treated separately, even if in sequence (see Lev 23:5 – 6; Nu 28:16 – 17; 2Ch 35:1, 17; Ezr 6; Eze 45:21). Likewise, the NT uses this twofold designation for the same feast: *pascha* (Jn 2:13, 23; 6:4; 11:55) and *azymos* (Mt 26:17; Lk 22:1, 7; cf. Mk 14:12).

"This day" (*hayyôm hazzeh*) of v.14 refers to the same day in view in vv.1 – 13. The slaying of the paschal lamb "between the evenings" (a literal Hebrew expression), which divides the fourteenth and fifteenth of Abib (= Nisan), looks forward to the festive celebration that night, the day of the exodus (= the night of

the Passover), namely, 15 Abib. The Israelites are to "commemorate" (*l'zikkārôn*, i.e., make it a memorial; see 3:15 above) that day as a "festival" (*ḥag*) and a "lasting [i.e., perpetual] ordinance" (*ḥuqqāt ʿôlām*).

For seven days they are to eat *maṣṣôt* ("unleavened cakes," i.e., "bread made without yeast," v.15), to remember Israel's haste in leaving Egypt (v.39) and to underscore again the conviction that impurity and corruption (sometimes symbolized by leaven) disqualifies persons from religious services (see comment on 3:5 – 6).The whole household must be pure and clean of heart; thus, all yeast must be removed from the entire house (v.19). The first and seventh days of that week, beginning with the celebration of the Passover, are to be holy convocations (v.16).

17 – 20 "I *brought* your divisions out" (emphasis mine; on "divisions," see Notes on 6:26) reflects a post-exodus stance. Thus (as commentators such as Keil and Delitzsch, and Rawlinson argue) the words of vv.17 – 20 may not be the verbatim words of revelation. Instead, they are either a recasting of the original revelation to incorporate the proper time perspective and the institutional nature of the ordinance now given, or they are a new extension of the original use of unleavened bread in the Passover to a new seven-day festival.

Verse 19 is not an empty repetition of v.15 but adds the important notice that Gentiles celebrate along with Israel, even as was contemplated in the Abrahamic covenant of Genesis 12:3: "all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you." The "alien"(*gēr*) includes the "mixed multitude" (v.38, KJV; NIV, "many other people") who left Egypt with Israel, the Kenites who joined them in the desert (Nu 10:29 – 31; Jdg 1:16), and those converted later, such as Rahab and her family (Jos 2:10 – 14). Rawlinson, 1:262, notes how the whole law is filled with references to this class of persons beginning in 20:10; 23:12.Those "native-born" are, no doubt, Abraham's descendants, who are here regarded as the true natives to the land of Canaan since God assigned it to them some six hundred years prior to the exodus.

NOTES

15 The exact etymology of מַצּוֹת (*maṣṣôt*, "bread [or 'cakes'; notice the plural]

made without yeast") is unknown. Suggestions are: (1) *ms.s.* ("to squeeze, press") — thus flat cakes; (2) *yṣ'* ("to go out"), as the Aramaic *pat.t.ira* ("unleavened bread") may be related to the Syriac *pṭr* ("depart") or even the Akkadian *pṭr* ("ransom"); (3) the Egyptian *ms.t* or *msw.t* ("food, cake") or *msw.t* ("evening meal"); or (4) the Greek *maza* ("barley bread") instead of the Greek *artos* ("wheat bread"). Each suggestion has problems according to Segal (107).

15, 19 Two distinct words are used for "yeast" or "leaven": שְׂאֹר (*śᵉʾōr*), perhaps the "old leaven" hidden and secret (Lk 12:1) that Paul urges believers to "get rid of " in 1 Co rinthians 5:7 (Bush, 142); and חָמֵץ (*ḥāmēṣ*, perhaps related to *ḥômēs*, "vinegar"), emphasizing "sourness," open malice, and a putrifying form (cf. Pss 71:4; 73:21).

וְנִכְרְתָה (*wᵉnikrᵉtâ*, lit., "that soul [feminine,'she'] shall be cut off [from Israel]") probably refers to expulsion from the community of Israel with the possibility that it might prove fatal to the person. Some argue it is the death penalty; others assure us that it is merely ostracism from the community. See Donald Wold, "The Meaning of the Biblical Penalty *Kareth*" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1978).

16 מִקְרָא־קֹדֶשׁ (*miqrāʾ-qōdeš*) is a called or convened gathering for sacred purposes, a "sacred assembly."

3. Celebration of the Passover (12:21 – 28)

[21]Then Moses summoned all the elders of Israel and said to them, "Go at once and select the animals for your families and slaughter the Passover lamb. [22]Take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. Not one of you shall go out the door of his house until morning. [23]When the LORD goes through the land to strike down the Egyptians, he will see the blood on the top and sides of the doorframe and will pass over that doorway, and he will not permit the destroyer to enter your houses and strike you down.

[24]"Obey these instructions as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants. [25]When you enter the land that the LORD will give you as he

promised, observe this ceremony. [26]And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ [27]then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped. [28]The Israelites did just what the LORD commanded Moses and Aaron.

COMMENTARY

21 – 23 When the instructions for the preparation of the Passover (and the topically connected but subsequent enlargement of the Passover in the Feast of Unleavened Bread) are completed, the elders are briefed on what each Israelite family must do (v.21). Two new items are included here: (1) blood must be applied to each doorframe by a “bunch of hyssop” dipped into a basin of blood, and (2) no one may leave the house “until morning” (v.22).This cannot be used to prove that these instructions are not part of God’s original revelation to Moses or that these verses preserve a different tradition of the Passover; as Cassuto, 143, argues, there is no need to repeat all the details of vv.1 – 20, nor is there any literary law that says additional particulars may not come out in subsequent rehearsing of the same material.

The lamb or kid to be slaughtered by each family is called (by the figure of speech known as metonymy, the exchange of one noun for a related noun) “the Passover” (*happāsaḥ*) itself. (The NIV attempts to aid the reader by rendering it, “the Passover lamb” [v.21].) Blood from this animal is placed in a basin and with “a bunch of hyssop” (v.22; see Notes) is “slapped” (the verb *ng²* is cognate with one of the words for “plague,” *nega²*, in 11:1) on the doorframe. The Hebrews will know the grounds and means of their deliverance and redemption: a sacrificed substitute and the blood of atonement in which the paschal animal dies *in place of* the firstborn of all who take shelter from the stroke of the destroyer.

“The destroyer” of v.23 (see Notes) is not a demonic power that rivals God but is probably an angel of the Lord who expedites the divine will. In Psalm 78:49, however, which uses four different words for anger to express God’s letting loose on the Egyptians, this wrath is collectively called “a band of destroying angels” (*mišlaḥat malᵃkê rāʿîm*). Thus, whether an angel is the mediating agent or the

term is a figurative personification of the final judgment of God on Egypt, it is still God's direct work. The NT remembers this "destroyer" (*ho olothreuōn*) in Hebrews 11:28. God's work in bringing the plague on Israel for Korah, Dathan, and Abiram's rebellion in Numbers 16:41 – 49 and the serpents in 21:5 – 6 will also be labeled the work of "the destroying angel" in 1 Corinthians 10:9 – 10 (see Notes).

24 – 28 Once again God makes provision for the annual observance of this ceremony and for the parental obligation to instruct children in the meaning and significance of this reenactment (v.24). The section closes with one of those rare notices in Israel's history: the people do exactly what the Lord commands (v.28) — and well they might after witnessing what has happened to the obstinate king and people of Egypt! (See also Hag 1:12, where the people obey the Lord.)

NOTES

22 אֵזוֹב (*ʾēzôb*, "hyssop") occurs ten times in the OT. (Hyssop appears twice in the NT: in Jn 19:29, as the instrument for lifting the vinegar to Jesus' lips while on the cross, and in Heb 9:19 – 20, where the people and the book are sprinkled with blood, though probably a different plant is meant.) Seven of the OT references are found in two rituals: cleansing a leper (Lev 14:4, 6, 49, 51 – 52) and cleansing those defiled through contact with the dead (Nu 19:6, 18). The other three references are Exodus 12:22; 1 Kings 4:33; and Psalm 51:7.

Most identify *ʾēzôb* with *Origanum Maru L.*, the Syrian marjoram (Arabic *ṣa'tar* and Akkadian *zūpu*) , or *Origanum Aegyptiacum* from Egypt. It is an aromatic herb in the mint family with a straight stalk, somewhat woody at the base, forming a dwarf bush with opposite deciduous leaves decreasing in size as they go up the stalk. This plant is found in the Sinai desert — it grew on the walls of Jerusalem (1Ki 4:33) — and has white flowers tinged with red on the outside. See L. Baldensperger and G. M. Crowfoot, "Hyssop," *PEQ* 63 [1931]: 89 – 98.

The LXX,Vulgate, and other passages translate סַף (*sap*, "basin") as "threshold." Rylaarsdam, 923, reports how Armenian miniatures depict the slaying of the lamb on the threshold and the blood spilled in a hollow place — perhaps one especially made for this purpose.

23 The substantive הַמַּשְׁחִית (*hammašḥît*, "the destroyer") appears thirty-five times in the OT, but only here does it seem to be a technical term (cf., however, v.13: לְמַשְׁחִית [*lᵉmašḥît*, "destructive (plague)"]; see especially 2Sa 24:16; Isa 37:36).

F. The Exodus from Egypt (12:29 – 51)

1. Death at Midnight (12:29 – 32)

> [29]At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. [30]Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.
>
> [31]During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, "Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the LORD as you have requested. [32]Take your fl ocks and herds, as you have said, and go. And also bless me."

COMMENTARY

29 – 30 The final stroke comes at midnight, 15 Abib. While the previous plagues may have utilized some of the natural and secondary agencies of nature, vv.23 and 29 attribute this tenth plague solely to Yahweh, who goes throughout the land of Egypt; death touches every "family" (*bayit*, "house," v.30), from Pharaoh's to the prisoner's (v.29; cf. 11:5, from Pharaoh to the slave girl working the hand mill).

Once again the "all" (*kol*), or "every," must be understood comparatively and not absolutely (cf. comment on 9:24 – 25), for strictly speaking, it would apply only to those households that have firstborn among their members or livestock. Bush, 146, notes that such universal negatives or affirmatives ("none," "all") leave the exceptions unstated when such are so few that they hardly deserve mention in comparison to the overwhelming number of cases being considered. (He mentions 1Sa 25:1: "All Israel assembled and mourned for [Saul]," i.e., with

few exceptions there was a tremendous outpouring of national feeling; John 12:19: “The whole world has gone after [Jesus],” but that too is hyperbolic. Such hyperboles are especially idiomatic in Semitic languages.)

31 – 32 How Pharaoh “summons” (*qr*ʾ) Moses and Aaron is unknown. Whether the king retracts his rash oath never to see these two men again (10:28) and recalls them one more time or uses ambassadors to convene his unconditional release cannot be determined — the verb is used in both senses. If it were the latter, however, then it is a striking fulfillment of 11:8.

The release granted Israel is for more than a three-day journey to worship the Lord. Previously when Pharaoh gave permission to leave (only immediately to rescind it or place unacceptable restrictions on it), he said, “Go, worship the LORD your God” (10:8, 24), or “Go, sacrifice to your God” (8:25); but now it is, “Up! Leave my people!” (v.31). As Keil and Delitzsch, 2:25, argue, this “cannot mean anything else than ‘depart altogether.’ ” In fact, God had predicted that the effect of this tenth blow would be so hard that Pharaoh would “drive [them] out completely” (11:1). They are to take everything Moses ever bargained for (“as you have said,” 12:32), including their flocks and herds.

As Moses is taking leave of the king and Egypt, Pharaoh has one more request as a final gesture. “Bless me,” he begs. Pharaoh, the god of Egypt, entreats Moses’ God to bless him! Israel is both blessed and a means of blessing others, even though in this case that blessing falls on an unrepentant heart, as 14:5 – 9 shows.

NOTE

29 הַבּוֹר (*habbôr*, “dungeon”) is usually a “well” or “cistern” but by extension is used of “those [= the dead] who go down to the pit.”

2. Preparations for the Exodus (12:33 – 36)

[33]The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country. “For

otherwise," they said, "we will all die!" [34]So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing. 35The Israelites did as Moses instructed and asked the Egyptians for articles of silver and gold and for clothing. [36]The LORD had made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the people, and they gave them what they asked for; so they plundered the Egyptians.

COMMENTARY

33 The Egyptians urge the Israelites most vehemently (*watteḥ'zaq*; cf. the same root *h.zq* [GK 2616] for Pharaoh's hardening of his heart) that they should leave immediately, for soon no Egyptians will be left if things continue as they are going.

34 The Israelites wrap the unleavened lumps of dough in sacks made from their outer garments or mantles and sling them over their shoulders along with their kneading troughs (see Notes) and whatever other incidentals they planned to take with them.

35 – 36 On the spoiling of the Egyptians, see comments on 3:21 – 22 and 11:1 – 3.

NOTE

34 On יֶחְמָץ (*yeḥmāṣ*, "[before] the yeast was added"), see Notes on 12:15, 19. מִשְׁאֶרֶת (*miš'ʾrōt*, "kneading troughs") occurs also in 8:3[7:28] and Deuteronomy 28:5, 17.These were probably something like the old Egyptian kneading trough, portable and wooden (cf. Pritchard, *ANEP*, no. 152).

3. The Exodus and the Mixed Multitude (12:37 – 51)

[37]The Israelites journeyed from Rameses to Succoth. There were about six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children. [38]Many

other people went up with them, as well as large droves of livestock, both flocks and herds. 39With the dough they had brought from Egypt, they baked cakes of unleavened bread. The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.

40Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years. 41At the end of the 430 years, to the very day, all the LORD's divisions left Egypt. 42Because the LORD kept vigil that night to bring them out of Egypt, on this night all the Israelites are to keep vigil to honor the LORD for the generations to come.

43The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "These are the regulations for the Passover:

"No foreigner is to eat of it. 44Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, 45but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it.

46"It must be eaten inside one house; take none of the meat outside the house. Do not break any of the bones. 47The whole community of Israel must celebrate it.

48"An alien living among you who wants to celebrate the LORD's Passover must have all the males in his household circumcised; then he may take part like one born in the land. No uncircumcised male may eat of it. 49The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien living among you."

50All the Israelites did just what the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron. 51And on that very day the LORD brought the Israelites out of Egypt by their divisions.

COMMENTARY

37 The wilderness itinerary now begins. George W. Coats ("The Wilderness Itinerary," *CBQ* 34 [1972]: 135 – 52) has collected the itinerary formulas to examine their unity and special function. Usually they consist of two elements: (1) the departure place name with *min* ("from") and the verb *naìsa<*("to journey," 12:37; 13:20; 16:1; 17:1; 19:2) and (2) the arrival location with *bʿ* ("at," 13:20; 17:1; 19:2), *ʾel* ("to," 15:22; 16:1), *ʿal* ("to," 14:2; 15:27), and various verbs such as *ḥānan* ("to camp," 13:20; 15:27; 17:1; 19:2), *bōʾ* ("to come,"

15:23, 27; 16:1; 19:2), and *yāṣā'* (“to lead,” 15:22).

“Rameses” is best identified with Qantir instead of the remoter but more popular Tanis (seventeen miles northeast), since Qantir was situated near the water — as the Egyptian documents observe, on the “Waters of Ra,” the Bubastite-Pelusiac eastern arm of the Nile River (see comment on 1:11; cf. Introduction: Route of the Exodus and the map). Succoth is now generally identified with Tell el Maskhuta in the Wadi Tumilat near modern Ismailia. Naville, 23, argued that Succoth was a district and not a city, the region of *Tkw* near Tell el Maskhuta. Thus the Hebrews pitch their tents in *the land* of Succoth, only a few miles from the store city of Pithom, where many had labored for years.

With the number of fighting men at six hundred thousand, the total number of Israelites could well be around two million. All attempts to explain *'elep* (“thousand”) as “clan” or “tribe” (George E. Mendenhall, “The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26,” *JBL* 77 [1958]: 52 – 66) in this context (cf., however, Jdg 6:15) fail to meet the test of consistency in other contexts (e.g., see comment on 38:25 – 26).

38 The “many other people” (*'ēreb* rab; KJV, “mixed multitude”; cf. the “swarms” of flies in 8:21[17], *'ārōb*) are composed of Egyptians (some “feared the word of the LORD” in 9:20), perhaps some of the Semitic population left from the Hyksos era and slaves native to other countries. Some of this group must be part of the “rabble” (*hā'sapsup*, lit., “a collection”) mentioned in Numbers 11:4. Thus the promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, of being a blessing to “all peoples on earth,” receives another fulfillment in this swarm of foreigners who are impressed enough by God’s power to leave Egypt with Israel after all the plagues have been performed. Another aspect of God’s display of his power is so that the Egyptians can, if they only would, be evangelized (7:5; 8:10, 19; 9:14, 16, 29 – 30; 14:4, 18).

39 As the Lord predicted in 11:1, the Israelites “had been driven out [*grš*] of Egypt.” Indeed, they leave so quickly that they have no time to prepare anything, much less set the yeast in the dough; so they leave with unleavened bread and make unleavened cakes during those early days (see comment and Notes on v.34).

40 – 42 Appropriately, now that the exodus has begun, the narrator takes a moment to reflect on the total Egyptian experience. Twice he comments that the sojourn in Egypt had been 430 years, "to the very day" (*bᵉʿeṣem hayyôm hazzeh*, v.41; notice the same expression in vv.17, 51). The LXX and Samaritan texts added the words "and in the land of Canaan" to the Hebrew text, thus making the total sojourn in Egypt only 215 years — a figure also allegedly supported by the genealogy of Moses and Aaron in Exodus 6:16 – 20 and Paul's statement in Galatians 3:17. But it is a mistake to suppose that the genealogy of Moses was intended to be complete (see comment on 2:1 – 4 for evidence to the contrary). One need only consult the genealogy of Joshua (1Ch 7:22 – 27) to see that there are many omissions of generations in Moses and Aaron's genealogy, for Joshua's genealogy has ten generations covering the same time span as Moses' four generations!

With respect to Paul's 430 years, it is important to notice that "the law" came "430 years later" (Gal 3:17) as an addition (cf. v.19) to "the promises . . . spoken to Abraham *and to his seed*" (v.16, emphasis mine).The *terminus a quo* for the 430 years in Paul's thinking would seem to be when Jacob received the last of those repeated patriarchal promises (Ge 46:2; 47:27) as he arrived in Egypt. The 430 years accord also with the four hundred years predicted in Genesis 15:13 – 16, when a nation (Egypt) whom they would "serve" could "mistreat" them, at the end of which time that nation would be "judged."

This night is to be observed by all future generations as a "Watchnight Service" (Cole, 113), for on that night the Lord "preserved" or "kept" the destroyer from touching them (v.42). There is a clear play on the word *.afÊmar* ("watch, preserve, keep vigil"): as Yahweh watched over Israel that night, so Israel is to watch for Yahweh by keeping this feast perpetually (cf. v.17).

43 – 49 With the mention of this night and the requirement that it be remembered by all future generations, it does bring to mind, especially in this context, the question of the "mixed multitude" who came out of Egypt with Israel and all such persons who might join them from time to time. Are they to keep the Passover also? Thus arises the necessity for repeating and elaborating instructions already given in two preceding sections.

No man is allowed to participate in that meal unless he is circumcised and thus a member of the community of faith (v.44; however, notice the requirement in Ge 17:13 – 14 to be part of the Hebrew community). This excludes temporary residents, hired workers, aliens, and all foreigners. Furthermore, each lamb is to remain in one house (as implied in vv.3 – 10). Its parts are not to be divided and eaten in separate homes; it serves as the basis of a fellowship meal stressing the unity and joy of the participants. Moreover, no bones of the paschal lamb are to be broken (cf. Ps 34:20 and Jn 19:33 – 36 for the same teaching about the antitype).This is "the LORD's Passover" (*pesaḥ lᵉyhwh*, v.48) and not the table of Israel; therefore, the same requirement is made of all, whether native-born (see Notes) or alien (v.49).

50 – 51 The concluding notice is that Israel does "just what the LORD had commanded" (v.50; cf. v.28); and "on that very day" (v.51; cf. vv.17, 41) the much-delayed exodus finally takes place as Yahweh brings the Hebrews out "by their divisions" (see Notes on 6:26). Surprisingly, the desert journey begins on the Sabbath!

NOTES

37 וַיִּסְעוּ (*wayyisʿû*, "[Israelites] journeyed") comes from a verb meaning "to pull up or out," i.e., the stakes or pins holding the tent. On טַף (*ṭāp*, "women and children"), see Notes on 10:24.

39 לְחָתְמַהְמֵהַּ (*lᵉḥitmahmēah*) is a Hithpalpel infinitive construct of mhh ("to tarry"; NIV, "[not] have time").

G. The Consecration of the Firstborn (13:1 – 16)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal."

[3]Then Moses said to the people, "Commemorate this day, the day you came out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, because the LORD brought

you out of it with a mighty hand. Eat nothing containing yeast. [4]Today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving. [5]When the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Hivites and Jebusites — the land he swore to your forefathers to give you, a land fl owing with milk and honey — you are to observe this ceremony in this month: [6]For seven days eat bread made without yeast and on the seventh day hold a festival to the LORD. [7]Eat unleavened bread during those seven days; nothing with yeast in it is to be seen among you, nor shall any yeast be seen anywhere within your borders. [8]On that day tell your son, 'I do this because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' [9]This observance will be for you like a sign on your hand and a reminder on your forehead that the law of the LORD is to be on your lips. For the LORD brought you out of Egypt with his mighty hand. [10]You must keep this ordinance at the appointed time year after year.

[11]"After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as he promised on oath to you and your forefathers, [12]you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. [13]Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

[14]"In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. [15]When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' [16]And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with his mighty hand."

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 Closely linked with the account of Israel's release from Egypt and the Passover is the consecration of all the firstborn in Israel. The connection of v.1 with the preceding events is secured by comparing the repeated reference to "that very day" (12:41, 51) with "this day" (13:3) and "today, in the month of Abib, you are leaving" (v.4). Therefore, the sanctification of all the firstborn is

commanded by God probably at Succoth, the first stopping place after the exodus (12:37); and it falls within the seven days set aside for the Feast of Unleavened Bread (12:15).

The general principle is set forth in v.2: every "firstborn" (*bĕkôr*) male of both man and beast (as explained in vv.12 – 13, i.e., the first "offspring" (*pet.er*, "that which opens [the womb]") belongs to the Lord and is therefore "to be set apart" (*qādaš*) from common usage for holy purposes. Thus God set aside the seventh day, the tabernacle, the tribe of Levi — and here all the firstborn.

The basis for God's claim is not connected here with his lordship over all creation (cf. Ps 24:1); rather, as Keil and Delitzsch, 2:33, point out from Numbers 3:13 and 8:17, it is based on the fact that God already set apart to himself the firstborn in Israel on the day he smote all the firstborn of Egypt. Their sanctification does not rest on their deliverance from the tenth plague; rather, God's adoption of Israel as his "firstborn" (see comment on 4:22) led to his delivering them. From that time on, the spared nation must dedicate the firstborn of its men and beasts in the way detailed in vv.12 – 16 in commemoration of God's acts of love and deeds that night.

3 – 10 Further directions are given relating this consecration of the firstborn to the Feast of Unleavened Bread. When Israel possesses the land promised to her, this ceremony (see Notes on v.5) is to be observed annually. The Israelites are to explain to their children (v.8) that they are eating unleavened bread and setting apart the firstborn to the Lord because of what Yahweh did personally for each subsequent Israelite (and believer) — "for me" (*lî*) —when he brought Israel out of Egypt. Likewise, in v.16 subsequent generations will be taught that he brought "us" out of Egypt (cf. Ps 66:6, "There [at the Red Sea] *we* rejoiced in him" [lit. tr., emphasis mine]; or Hos 12:4, "There [at Bethel when God spoke to Jacob] he spoke with *us*" [lit. tr., emphasis mine]; more examples of past events being used to speak to those in the present are Mt 15:7; 22:31; Mk 7:6; Ac 4:11; Ro 4:23 – 25; 15:4; 1Co 10:11; 2Co 9:8 – 11; Heb 6:18; 10:15; 12:15 – 17).

This festival and consecration are to be a "sign" (see comment on 3:12) on the people's hands and a "reminder" or "memorial" (see comment on 3:15) between their eyes (v.9). No doubt this injunction is a figurative and proverbial mode of speech (cf. Pr 3:3, "Bind them around your neck, write them on . . . your heart";

also Pr 6:21; 7:3; SS 8:6), for the law of the Lord was “to be on [their] lips” (Ex 13:9).

The Jewish practice of writing Exodus 13:1 – 16 on two of the four strips of parchment (along with Dt 6:4 – 9 and 11:13 – 21 on the other two) and placing them in two cubical leather boxes (*tepillîn*; cf. “phylacteries,” Mt 23:5) strapped on to the forehead and left arm seems to have originated in the Babylonian captivity. These were worn especially at daily morning prayers. This practice, however, exchanged the intended inner reality for an external ritual. God intends his word to activate our lips, hearts, and hands, not to be trapped in a box.

11 – 16 As Israel “passed over” (*ʿbr*) the Red Sea and the destroyer “passed over” their firstborn, so now they were “to cause to pass over” or “give over” (*ʿbr*) to the Lord all their firstborn when they enter the land (v.12). (Notice also the connection between the “Passover” and the “pass[ing] over” of the death angel in the comment on 12:13.) Only two slight modifications (13:13) are made to this principle: (1) all firstborn male humans (firstborn females were exempted) are to be redeemed (*pādâ*) or “bought back at a price” (fixed at five shekels per male in the fuller description in Nu 18:16; cf. also Nu 3:46 – 47), and (2) donkeys are to be “bought back” or “ransomed” (*pādâ*) by a lamb or kid, since donkeys are unclean animals and therefore unfit for sacrifice. To prevent any refusal to follow this command to ransom their animals, the Israelites are to kill them by breaking their necks.

The obligation of the firstborn to serve Yahweh in some nonpriestly work around the sanctuary is later transferred to the Levites, who become God’s authorized substitutes for each firstborn boy or man (Nu 3). When the number of Levites is exhausted, additional males can be ransomed or redeemed at the price of five shekels apiece.Verses 15 – 16 again reiterate the explanation: the firstborn are owned by Yahweh, for he dramatically spared them in the tenth plague, *and* he had previously called them to be his firstborn in 4:22.

NOTES

3 מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים (*mibbêṯ ʿ*ᵉ*bādîm*, “land of slavery”) is literally “from a house of slaveries” (also 20:2; Dt 5:6; 6:12). Bush, 1:155, reminds us of Egypt’s being called “the

iron-smelting furnace” in Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; and Jeremiah 11:4.

3 – 4 The interchange of plural second-person pronouns in vv.3 and 4 with second-person singular pronouns in vv.2 and 5ff. is another extension of the collective singular phenomenon seen before and another illustration of Israel’s corporate solidarity (see William Kesecker, “A Study of the Literary Phenomenon of the Second Person Interchange in Deut 1 – 11,” M.A. thesis, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 1977).

5 On the list of Canaanite nations, see Notes on 3:8. On the land “flowing with milk and honey,” see comment on 3:8.

Although הָעֲבֹדָה (*hā·ʿă·bōdâ*) is rendered “ceremony” here and in 12:25 – 26, it was translated “slavery” and “work” in 2:23 and 5:9; but it is a “work [or service of the LORD]” in 35:24; 36:5; 39:42. Thus Israel was saved *from* “slavery” *into* “ser vice” for God as *remembered by* a “ceremony”! A veritable theology in a single word!

10 מִיָּמִים יָמִימָה (*miyyāmîm yāmîmâ*, “year after year”) is literally “from days to days” and is an example of the frequent use of “days” for the concept “years” (Bush, 1:157).

16 וּלְטוֹטָפֹת (*ûlᵉṭôṭāpōt*; NIV, “a symbol”) is (lit.) “as frontlets/bands about the forehead”(cf. v.9 and Dt 6:8; 11:18). Rawlinson, 1:300, believes that Moses borrowed and reinterpreted the Egyptian practice of wearing as amulets “forms of words written on folds of papyrus tightly rolled up and sewn in linen.”

H. Journey to the Red Sea (13:17 – 15:21)
1. Into the Wilderness (13:17 – 22)

17When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said,“If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.” 18So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for battle.

[19]Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”

[20]After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. [21]By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. [22]Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

COMMENTARY

17 – 18 There were three possible routes of escape: (1) a northeasterly route going to Qantara through the land of the Philistines to Gaza and Canaan; (2) a middle route heading across the Negev to Beer-sheba, which incorrectly assumes Mount Sinai is Gebel Halal near Kadesh Barnea; and (3) a southeasterly route leading from the wilderness east of modern Ismailia to the southern extremities of the Sinai Peninsula. Israel is warned not to take the shorter route through Philistia, for the prospects of fighting the bellicose Philistines (see Notes) would so demoralize Israel that they would change their minds (see Notes) and return to the servitude in Egypt (v.17). This judgment proves correct when Israel is threatened with war in Numbers 14:4.

Thus God leads Israel around by the “desert road” or the “way of the wilderness” (*derek*^{hammidbār}) toward the “Red Sea” or, better, “Sea of Reeds” (*yam-sûp*; Egyp. *p3 t* [*w*] *f*, pronounced *pa tjû* and meaning “papyrus” or “papyrus marshes”). Kenneth Kitchen (*ZPEB*, 5:46 – 49) associates this body of water with Lake Menzaleh or Lake Ballah; he notes that *Yam Suph* (NIV mg.) may also be connected with the Gulf of Suez.

Israel camps on the west coast of the Sinai Peninsula by *Yam Suph* on their way to Horeb/Sinai (Nu 33:10 – 11), and later *Yam Suph* is also used to refer to the salt waters of the Gulf of Aqabah (Dt 1:1; 1Ki 9:26; see Notes on 2:3). Thus nothing prevents our linking *Yam Suph* with the Red Sea. (The Red Sea of that day did not include the Gulf of Suez — a modern extension of the Red Sea.)

19 This verse is a verbatim report of Joseph’s words in Genesis 50:25 except

for the words “with you.” God’s promise of the land is never far from sight in any of these passages.

20 The exact location of Etham (ʾētām) is unknown. Many associate it with the Egyptian city of *Khetem* (spelled *h.tm*, meaning “fort”), but the Hebrew *aleph* sound hardly equals the strong Egyptian guttural *h*. sound. Naville, 24, suggests the region of Atuma, a desert that begins at Lake Timsah and extends west and south of it, where Asiatic Bedouin from the land of Atuma grazed their flocks (Papyrus Anastasi IV.55, *ANET*, 259; Egyp. ʾidm).

Etham is described as a region in Numbers 33:6 and presumably is the desert of Shur (Ex 15:22). Kitchen (*ZPEB*, 2:430) locates the wilderness of Shur/Etham from Lake Timsah (near Ismailia) north to the Mediterranean Sea and east of the present Suez Canal, perhaps to El-Arish and the “Brook of Egypt.” Rawlinson, 1:xxix, noting that Etham is “on the edge of the desert” (13:20), places Etham at El-Qantara, on the line of the Suez Canal and eleven to twelve miles due east of Tel Defneh (ancient Daphnae). Everyone is guessing!

21 – 22 How God leads the Israelites (v.17) is now explained. This single “pillar” (14:24) — a cloud by day and a fire by night, whose width at the base is sufficiently large to provide cover for Israel from the intense heat (Ps 105:39) — is a visible symbol of the presence of Yahweh in their midst.

The pillar of the cloud and fire is another name for “the angel of God,” for 14:19 equates the two (see also 23:20 – 23). In fact, God’s Name is “in” this angel who goes before his people to bring them into Canaan (23:20 – 23). He is the “angel of his presence” (Isa 63:8 – 9). According to Malachi 3:1, this angel is the “messenger of the covenant,” who is the Lord, the owner of the temple. Obviously, then, the Christ of the NT is the *shekinah* glory, or Yahweh of the OT. Through this cloudy pillar the Lord speaks to Moses (33:9 – 11) and to the people (Ps 99:6 – 7).We have seen such easy movement from the pillar of cloud and fire to the angel and back to the Lord himself in the interchange between the burning bush, the angel, and the Lord in ch. 3 (see Notes on 3:2).

NOTES

17 All references to the Philistines before the twelfth century BC, it is alleged, are anachronistic since they only arrived on the scene around that time, along with various waves of other Sea Peoples.Yet already in the early twentieth century Flinders Petrie argued that there was substantial evidence for Philistine presence as early as the patriarchal era if but for no other reason than to raise crops to be transported back to their homeland on Caphtor/Crete (see Ed Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970], 39, 59).

יִנָּחֵם (*yinnāḥēm*, "[lest the people] change [their] minds") is from the famous root *nh.m* ("to repent") and illustrates its meaning in a nontheologically sensitive passage.

18 The MT has וַחֲמֻשִׁים (*waḥᵃmušîm*, "armed for battle"; so Gesenius, Rashi, the Vulgate). The LXX has "the fifth generation"; Ewald opts for "in five divisions," viz., vanguard, center, rearguard, and two flanking wings, from *hāmēš* ("five"). See also Joshua 1:14; 4:12; Judges 7:11 for its other usages.

2. At the Red Sea (14:1 – 14)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, [2]"Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. [3]Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.' [4]And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelites did this.

[5]When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fl ed, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" [6]So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. [7]He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. [8]The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. [9]The Egyptians —all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops — pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi

Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

10As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. 11They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? 12Didn’t we say to you in Egypt, ‘Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians’? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!”

13Moses answered the people,“Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.”

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 The command “to turn back” (שׁוּב, v.2) means a change in direction and perhaps even a temporary setback for Israel, but which way do they go? Finegan, 85, has Israel turn back to the west and then turn south to get around the bulging upper part of the large Bitter Lake. Then they go southeastward between the mountain range of Jebel Jenefel and the large and small Bitter Lakes —all connected by water with the Gulf of Suez as the Pharaonic Canal, which ran through the Wadi Tumilat. Kitchen (*ZPEB*, 2:430) rejects this reasoning and has Israel go north-northwest, then north toward Qantara. But this northern retreat would take them back to the centers of Egyptian power and toward the divinely forbidden coastal route.

“Pi Hahiroth” (v.2) was opposite Baal Zephon (see Notes) and between Migdol and the sea (Nu 33:7). This site of Pi Hahiroth has not yet been identified (see Notes). A possible location for Migdol (“tower”; Egyp. *Mktr*) is either Migdol near Succoth, mentioned in a papyrus of Seti I’s time, or the ruins of a square tower on a height known as Jebel Abu Hasan overlooking the southern part of the small Bitter Lake. The latter was discovered by Jean Cledat and contained carvings and texts, some with the names of Seti I and Rameses II (see Finegan, 86).

Pharaoh assumes that Israel’s divine help has run out and that they are

hopelessly entangled on a dead-end trail since the desert, the sea, and marshes bar their way out of this trap. God, however, has commanded Moses (v.3, "Pharaoh will think") to take this impossible route once more to show the Egyptians who is God (v.4; see 7:17; 9:14) and to show Israel God's great power (14:30 – 31). God intends to receive glory from Pharaoh and his army whether Pharaoh yields (cf. much later Cyrus in the exact situation) or rebels and says in effect, "Those Hebrews will leave this place over my dead body!"

5 – 9 For those who reject the fact that Israel numbered somewhere around two million and decide instead that they were about five thousand, the number of chariots and the size of the army must surely be an extreme case of overkill (v.7). Shortly after Israel leaves, Pharaoh and his officials quickly put aside the terrors of that awful night when they lost their firstborn and decide to go after Israel as they march out of Egypt "boldly" (v.8; see Notes).

10 – 12 When they see the Egyptian troops, the Israelites cry out in despair to the Lord (v.10), but not for long. Moses is a much more immediate target than the Lord, so they complain to him (v.11). Were there "no graves at all [double negative: *mib-*בְּלִי קְבָרִים] in Egypt?" They mock in the most satirical tone possible (since Egypt specialized in graves and had about three-fourths of its land area available for gravesites). Then follows the crepe hanging, with its "I-told-you-so" pseudo-prophets (v.12). Suddenly the hardships of their Egyptian bondage are forgotten.

13 – 14 The formerly quick-tempered Moses patiently answers the people's hasty accusation with three directives to meet this emergency: (1) "Do not be afraid" (v.13; cf. the word to the patriarchs in Ge 15:1; 26:24; to Israel as they possess the land in Jos 1:9; 8:1); (2) "stand firm" and see the salvation, i.e., the "deliverance of the LORD" for "the LORD will fight for you" (v.14; see Ne 4:20; Ps 35:1); and (3) "be still," i.e., stop all action and become inactive, for I the Lord will act by myself on your behalf (cf. Ge 34:5; 2Ki 19:11; Pss 5:3; 83:1).

NOTES

2 פִּי הַחִירֹת (*pî hāhîrōt,* "Pi Hahiroth") has been explained from the Hebrew as

meaning “the mouth of the canals.” But the name is probably Egyptian, from *Pi-H.rt*, “temple of [the Syrian goddess] *H.rt*” (C. DeWit, *The Date and Route of the Exodus* [London: Tyndale, 1959], 17), *Pa-H.ir*, “The Hir-waters [of a canal or lake]” (*ZPEB*, 2:430), or *Pi(r) H.wt-H.r*, “The dwelling of Hathor” (Montet, 64).

Kitchen (*ZPEB*, 2:430) suggests that בַּעַל צְפֹן (*baʿal ṣpōn*, “Baal Zephon”) be equated with the later Tahpanhes, Greek Daphnai at Tell Defenneh, eight and a half miles from Qantara, since a later Phoenician papyrus has “Baal-Zephon and all the gods of Tahpanhes.” Montet, 63, cites two stelae found by Cledat at Gebel Shaduf (*Kemi* 7 [1938]: pl. XX), where on one stela Rameses II is perhaps honoring Baal Zephon and on the other he is paying homage to Soped, Lord of the East (Goshen).

6 עַמּוֹ (*ʿammô*, “his army”) is the usual word for “his people.” In this context it is a wordplay on עִמּוֹ (*ʿimmô* (“with him”). See v.17, חֵלוֹ (*ḥêlô* (“his army”), or v.19, מַחֲנֵה (*maḥᵃnēh* (“army”), for the more usual words.

7 Etymologically the term שָׁלִשִׁם (*šālišim*, “officers”) means something like “three-man [chariots],” presumably a driver, a shield-bearer, and a warrior. This practice, however, was known among only the Hittites and Assyrians, not the Egyptians, whose chariots had only two occupants as far as we know. A. E. Cowley (“A Hittite Word in Hebrew,” *JTS* 21 [1920]: 326) plausibly claimed that the word is related to the Hittite *šal-li-iš*, a military title indicating high rank.The Ugaritic parallel *tltm sswm mrkbt* (“three horses and a chariot”) points to a different solution. P. C. Craigie (“An Egyptian Expression in the Song of the Sea: Exodus XV.4,” *VT* 20 [1970]: 85) may have the best solution: *šlš* is Egyptian *srs*, “to have command of [a corps].” See comment on 15:4.

In the expression וְכֹל רֶכֶב (*wᵉkol rekeb*, “with all [the other] chariots”), the word “all” is probably to be understood in the general sense described in our comments on 9:6 and 9:24 – 25 and not in a strict mathematical sense.

8 יֹצְאִים בְּיָד רָמָה (*yoṣᵉʾîm bᵉyād rāmâ*, “marching out boldly”) is literally “going out with a high hand” (cf. also Nu 33:3). In Numbers 15:30 “high hand” (NIV, “defiantly”) is used for the sin of blaspheming God, i.e., an attempt personally to take on God in deliberate and demonstrative rebellion.

3. Across the Red Sea (14:15 – 31)

15 Then the LORD said to Moses, “Why are you crying out to me? Tell
the Israelites to move on. 16 Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over
the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on
dry ground. 17 I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go
in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army,
through his chariots and his horsemen. 18 The Egyptians will know that I am
the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his
horsemen.”

19 Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s
army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from
in front and stood behind them, 20 coming between the armies of Egypt and
Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and
light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

21 Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the
LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry
land. The waters were divided, 22 and the Israelites went through the sea on
dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

23 The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and
horsemen followed them into the sea. 24 During the last watch of the night
the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian
army and threw it into confusion. 25 He made the wheels of their chariots
come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s
get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against
Egypt.”

26 Then the LORD said to Moses,“Stretch out your hand over the sea so
that the waters may fl ow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and
horsemen.” 27 Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak
the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fl eeing toward it, and
the LORD swept them into the sea. 28 The water flowed back and covered
the chariots and horsemen — the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed
the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

29 But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of

water on their right and on their left. [30]That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. [31]And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

COMMENTARY

15 – 18 Since God promised to bring Israel out of Egypt and to give them the land of Canaan, then Moses and Israel had best stop their crying (*ṣ‘q*) to high heaven and begin moving on (*ns‘*; v.15). The contrast between vv.16 and 17 is clear: “You” (*’attâ*), Moses (emphatic position), use your staff to “divide” or “form a valley” (*bq‘*) so that Israel may go through the sea “on dry ground” (*bayyabbāšâ*); “I” (*’ānî*, v.17, again in the emphatic position as is “you” in v.16), the Lord, will harden the hearts of the (pursuing) Egyptians — this is the first and only time the hearts of Egyptians other than Pharaoh are hardened (though cf. 9:12).Verses 17 – 18 repeat with slight expansions the promises of vv.3 – 4.

19 – 20 The identity of the angel of God is clarified in v.19b: the pillar of cloud and fire (see comment on 13:22). The reality of God’s promised presence may be stated in the symbol of his presence (the pillar of cloud and fire), in his messenger (the angel of the Lord), or as the Lord himself who goes “ahead of them” (13:21; cf. 14:24). But when God’s presence “withdraws” (*ns‘*), he goes behind them to protect Israel’s rear guard. What is light for Israel becomes darkness for the Egyptians (v.20). The double nature of God’s glory in salvation and judgment, which later appears so frequently in Scripture, cannot be more graphically depicted.

21 – 22 With the single gesture of Moses’ upraised hand over the sea, the Lord “drives back” (*yôlek*, v.21) the sea by means of a “strong east wind all that night” (lit. tr.; cf. 15:8).The exact location of this “Reed Sea” crossing is unknown, but it seems best to locate it somewhere between the southern end of the Bitter Lakes and the Gulf of Suez or even in the northern tip of the Gulf of Suez itself (Finegan and Bourdon; see above on v.2), rather than in Lake Ballah (cf. *ZPEB*, 2:430) or south of Lake Timsah (Naville, 26) on the southern end of Lake Menzaleh, with its possible equation of Baal Zephon with Daphnae (Hyatt, 159). Even the width of this separation of the waters must have been somewhere

around one-half mile wide (see Keil and Delitzsch, 2:47) to allow two million people to pass over in one night before the wind died down during the "last watch" (v.24), i.e., approximately between 2:00 a.m. and 6:00 a.m. (sunrise).

Meanwhile the waters form a "wall" (*ḥōmâ*, v.22) on the right and on the left. They are piled up like a "heap" (*nēd*, 15:8; Ps 78:13 [NIV, "wall"]). It is true that the last two references are found in poems; therefore the language can be poetic and not mean literal "walls." But the prose text of ch. 14 is so explicit that to attempt to read this as a metaphor poses more problems than it solves. One must then ask: Of what is it a metaphor? Certainly it does not convey the idea of hardness or solidity. If it is a metaphor for protection, would not the sweeping of the waves back in one direction also convey the same message? No, the event, while incorporating the natural elements of the wind, has the element of the exceptional accompanying it (cf. Dt 4:32, 34), as did the previous plagues. Thus it strongly suggests the presence of God in the event.

23 – 28 Sometime during the morning watch (NIV, "last watch," v.24), the Lord looks down (*šāqap*; cf. Dt 26:15; Pss 14:2; 53:2; 102:19; for this anthropomorphism, see comments on 3:7 – 10). This look is never just ocular but also a demonstration of some wrath or mercy (Bush, 1:181). From the pillar of fire and cloud the Lord looks down at the Egyptian army as it begins to pursue Israel across the recently formed valley in the sea and "throws it into confusion" (*hmm*, a verb used to describe the panic and disarray of an army before a superior challenger, especially when God enters the battle — as in 23:27; Jos 10:10; Jdg 4:15; 1Sa 7:10; Ps 18:14). This "look" of God takes on concrete proportions, for the pillar of fire must have suddenly lit up the sky with such a flash in the darkness that the chariots careen against one another.

Meanwhile a spectacular display of thunder, lightning, rain, and earthquake is unleashed so that the boldest and most arrogant of Egypt's charioteers are struck with terror (see Ps 77:16 – 20). By this time the thoroughly distracted Egyptians have another problem: God makes the chariot wheels "come off " (NIV) or "jam" (cf. NIV mg.) against one another (*yasar*, from the root *swr*, "to turn"; see Notes on v.25) so that the Egyptians have difficulty driving.

The Egyptians have had enough and are willing to forget about Israel altogether, but it is too late. The Lord has begun his fight against them as

promised in v.14, described in vv.27, 31, and celebrated in 15:3: “The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.” The Hebrews have only to stand still and watch the victory won on their behalf, for with the upraised hand of Moses, the walls of water cascade toward each other to resume their usual place just as dawn breaks.

Pharaoh loses all the men and chariots he has committed to that engagement.The text never says that Pharaoh himself dies here, even though Psalm 136:15 records that God “swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea.” This may be the figure of hendiadys (i.e., two expressions for one concept) for “Pharaoh’s army.” Furthermore, “swept” is not necessarily “death” (so argued Rawlinson, 1:345). Even the destruction of the “entire army of Pharaoh” is qualified by the clause “that had followed the Israelites into the sea” (v.28; see discussion of *kol*, “all, entire,” in 9:24 – 25). But all involved in the chase certainly perish, “not one of them survived” (v.28).

29 – 31 The Lord “saves” (*yš*ʿ) the Hebrews that day, and they see the corpses of the Egyptians (the Hebrew simply has “Egypt,” the entire nation being seen as one individual corpse!) floating by (v.30). Josephus (*Ant.* 2.349 [16.6]) assures us (without any biblical warrant) that the wind turns around and blows the bodies of the drowned corpses to the eastern shore so that Moses can obtain the weapons and armor for many of his men.

Above all, the Hebrews see with what great powers (*yād*, lit., “hand”) the Lord delivers them, and they fear (*yr*ʾ; see comment and Notes on 1:17) and believe (*ʾmn*; see Notes on 4:5) both God and Moses, the servant of the Lord. Their response is back to where it was in 4:31 (see comment there) and the goal stated in 9:29 – 30: “that you [in this case, Egyptians] might know that the earth is the LORD’s . . . [and] fear [him].” The fear of Yahweh (v.31) is the signal of a responsive attitude of submission and love equivalent to wholehearted trust.

NOTES

25 וַיְנַהֲגֵהוּ בִּכְבֵדֻת (*wayʿnahʿgēhû bikbēdût*) is rendered, “so that they had difficulty driving.” The verb *nhg* is used for driving a chariot (cf. Jehu’s infamous driving habits in 2Ki 9:20).The word for “difficulty” seems to echo the “severity” (*kābēd nmʾōd*, “very heavy”) of God’s previous warnings in 9:3, 18, 24; 10:14; 12:38.

27 לְאֵיתָנוֹ (*lᵊʾêtānô*, "to its place") describes the course of the sea after the passing of Israel. The word *ʾêtān* is used in Psalm 74:15 and Amos 5:24 of "ever flowing" rivers. Thus the waters were not a temporary high tide, but they had a normal position and depth where Israel crossed.

If the translation of לִקְרָאתוֹ (*liqrāʾtô*, "toward [or 'from'] meeting it") is "toward," then the picture is of the Egyptians fleeing back to the west side (cf. 15:10) of the sea as the winds swing around to close off their retreat, with the walls of water cascading in on them. If "from" is the correct translation, then the Egyptians' line of retreat is governed by the point where the waters first begin to close in on them!

Commenting on וַיְנַעֵר (*wayᵉnaʿēr*, "and [the LORD] swept them [into the sea]"), Bush, 1:182, paints the vivid picture of the Lord as "shaking off" the Egyptians as Nehemiah "shook out" his lap (Ne 5:13). Accordingly, God will "shake out" the disobedient as he "shakes" the wicked out of the earth (Job 38:13; Ps 136:15).

4. Song at the Sea (15:1 – 21)

OVERVIEW

This song is one of three composed by Moses (see also Dt 31:30 – 32:43; Ps 90). Several names have been given to this song: "The Song of Moses and Miriam," "The Song of Miriam," and "The Song of Moses," though the latter title is usually reserved for Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32. However we label it, it is a victory ode that hymns the spectacular power and unrivaled supremacy of God over Pharaoh's chariots when God delivered the Hebrews. The focus of the song is on Yahweh himself (*yhwh* appears ten times). Its general outline is divided between two themes: vv.1b – 12 is a retrospective description of the overthrow of the Egyptian forces, and vv.13 – 18 is a prospective prediction of the Hebrews' entrance into the Promised Land. There is little agreement, however, on the length and division of the strophes.

The study by James Muilenberg (“A Liturgy on the Triumphs ofYahweh,” in *Studia Biblica et Semitica* [eds. W. C. van Unnik and A. S. van der Wonde; Wageningen: Veenman & Zonen, 1966], 233 – 51) has supplied some strong clues for dividing off the strophic structure of this song on the basis of repeated expressions or refrains that act as dividers between strophes.Thus the two most important refrains are the three similes — “like a stone” (v.5b), “like lead” (v.10b), “as a stone” (v.16a) — and the repetitive or staircase Hebrew parallelisms where normally the first two elements of each colon are repeated but the third element is different: “Your right hand, O LORD . . . your right hand, O LORD” (v.6); “Who . . . is like you . . . who is like you” (v.11); and “until your people pass by . . . until the people . . . pass by” (v.16b).

Muilenberg’s divisions were accepted by David Noel Freedman (“Strophe and Meter in Exodus 15,” in *A Light unto My Path* [eds. H. N. Bream, R. D. Heim, and C. A. Moore; Philadelphia: Temple Univ. Press, 1974], 163 – 203), and vv.6, 11, and 16b were considered “hymnic responses” that concluded each strophe. But this allowed scholars to leave vv.17 – 18 to dangle as a late intrusion. Furthermore, it fails to keep the pattern of v.1b, where Moses and all Israel sing the “hymnic introit” together.

Therefore, we argue that the similes of vv.5b, 10b, and 16a mark the conclusion of each strophe and that the repetitive parallelism of vv.6, 11, and 16b mark the hymnic introduction to the next strophe, as it does in v.1b. Accordingly, there are four strophes: (I) vv.1b – 5; (II) vv.6 – 10; (III) vv.11 – 16a; (IV) vv.16b – 18. The first two are retrospective and the last two prospective in nature. Each strophe is then divided into three parts: Part A: an exordium (v.1, which also serves as an introit, as do vv.6, 11, 16b also); Part B: a confession (vv.2 – 3, 7 – 8, 12 – 13, 17); and Part C: the narration (first two strophes, vv.4 – 5, 9 – 10) or the anticipation (last two strophes, vv.14 – 16a, 18) of God’s work in judgment or salvation. Scholars are almost unanimous in labeling this song as very old, based on such archaic features as the *mo* ending in vv.7, 9, 12, 15, 17; the archaic relative particle *zû* in vv.13, 16; and certain technical Egyptological terms in v.4.

Strophe I (vv.1b – 5)
Part A: Introit (v.1b: “I will sing to the LORD”)
Part B: Confession (vv.2 – 3)

Part C: Narration (vv.4 – 5)
Strophe II (vv.6 – 10)
Part A: Introit (v.6: “Your right hand, O LORD”)
Part B: Confession (vv.7 – 8)
Part C: Narration (vv.9 – 10)
Concluding Simile: “like lead” (v.10b)
Strophe III (vv.11 – 16a)
Part A: Introit (v.11:“Who . . . is like you, O LORD?”)
Part B: Confession (vv.12 – 13)
Part C: Anticipation (vv.14 – 16a)
Concluding Simile: “as a stone” (v.16a)
Strophe IV (vv.16b – 18)
Part A: Introit (v.16b: “Until your people pass by, O LORD”)
Part B: Confession (v.17)
Part C: Anticipation (v.18)

[1]Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:
“I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.
[2]The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father’s God, and I will exalt him.
[3]The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.
[4]Pharaoh’s chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh’s officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.
[5]The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.
[6]“Your right hand, O LORD,
was majestic in power.
Your right hand, O LORD,
shattered the enemy.
[7]In the greatness of your majesty
you threw down those who opposed you.

You unleashed your burning anger;
it consumed them like stubble.
8By the blast of your nostrils
the waters piled up.
The surging waters stood firm like a wall;
the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea.
9“The enemy boasted,
‘I will pursue, I will overtake them.
I will divide the spoils;
I will gorge myself on them.
I will draw my sword
and my hand will destroy them.’
10But you blew with your breath,
and the sea covered them.
They sank like lead
in the mighty waters.
11“Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?
Who is like you —
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?
12You stretched out your right hand
and the earth swallowed them.
13“In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.
14The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.
15The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people of Canaan will melt away;
16terror and dread will fall upon them.
By the power of your arm
they will be as still as a stone —
until your people pass by, O LORD,
until the people you bought pass by.

17 You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance —
the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.
18 The LORD will reign
for ever and ever.”
19 When Pharaoh’s horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them:
“Sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.”

COMMENTARY

1 Strophe I: Part A: Hymnic introit.The first person — “I will sing”— is not unusual for such invocations (cf. Jdg 5:3; Pss 89:1; 101:1; 108:1) when the whole community praises God as *one* collective person; yet each also makes such praise-confession personally his own. The motivating reason is given immediately: “for [*kî*] he is [lit.] gloriously glorious” in that “the horse and its rider [see Notes] he has hurled into the sea.”

2 – 3 Part B: Confession. The two themes of the introit’s two bicola are now treated in sequence: (1) the Lord (in vv.2 – 3) and (2) the overthrown enemy (the narration in vv.4 – 5). In this confession five attributes of “Yah” (a shortened form of Yahweh) are given — all in the first person: “my strength,” “my song” (see Notes), “my salvation,” “my God,” and “my father’s God” (on this last one, see the Notes on 3:6). The singular “father’s” is not what one would have expected if the reference is to the patriarchs. Perhaps it is a reference to the key patriarch, Abraham, or it could be an allusion to that generation’s biological parents. This latter suggestion, however, seems much less likely and is anticlimactic.

Then v.3 continues in the third person: “The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name” (on “Name,” see comment on 3:15).The title in v.3 has caused many Christians to ask, “How can this ‘man of war’ [also in Isa 42:13] be related to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ?” In Craigie’s view (183 – 88), God must be involved with the world as it is; otherwise his only contact with the world would be through the miraculous. The fact that he acts at all in wars speaks only to the point of his immanence and presence in the fabric of life, but it does not tell us any more about the moral character of God than does “the LORD is our rock” or “stone” or “high tower.”The phrase, then, is another anthropomorphism. (See also Labuschagne, 97 – 104; Frank M. Cross, “The Divine Warrior in Israel’s Early Cult,” in *Biblical Motifs* [ed. A. Altman; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966], 11 – 30.)

4 – 5 Part C: The narration of the work of God. The concern shifts to the enemy, and the four key words focus on the water: “sea” (*yām*), “Red Sea” (*yam-sûp*), the “deep waters” (*t*ehōmōt*), and the “depths” (*mᵉṣôlōt*). Just as the verbs of the confession in Part B were parallel ideas — “I will praise him,” “I will exalt him” — so here they are synonymous: “he has hurled into the sea . . . are drowned.. . . The deep waters have covered them . . . they sank.” Then the strophe ends with a simile: “they sank to the depths like a stone.” Some worry that being “hurled” (15:4) into the sea doesn’t match with being “covered” (14:28), but Houtman, 2:278 – 80, understands that the Egyptian army may have been cast down into the sea by the waves returning to their former spot; thus the waters covered the army personnel and they drowned.

Three expressions in v.4 remind us of the strong Egyptian influence still exerted on Hebrew culture. The “Red Sea” or “Sea of Reeds” has been discussed above on 13:18. Craigie, 183 – 88, pointed to A. S. Yahuda’s equation of “the best” (*mibḥar*) with the Egyptian *ỉtp.w* (“the choicest”). Craigie then adds another possible Egyptian root of his own: Hebrew *šlš* (“officers”) may come from the Eighteenth- Dynasty Egyptian word *srs* (“to have command of a corps”; see Notes on 14:7 for further discussion and documentation).

6 Strophe II: Part A: Exordium.With repeated use of “your right hand, O LORD,” the song announces the beginning of the second strophe using a descriptive metaphor for the omnipotence of God (cf. Moses’ song at Dt 33:2 and numerous psalms). In this strophe more details and the mode of the enemy’s destruction are given.

7 – 8 Part B: Confession. The first line of four bicola recalls the phrase "highly exalted" of the introit (*gā'ōh gā'â*, v.1). In the "greatness of your majesty" (*ûbᵉrōb gᵉ'ônᵉkā*) you "pulled them down" (*hānas*; NIV, "threw down"; usually of demolishing buildings), those "risers up against you" (*qāmeykā*; NIV, "opposed you"; here of those who wanted to destroy the building of God [Keil and Delitzsch, 2:52]). God, with the burning heat of his wrath and a fiery look from the pillar of cloud, "consumed them like stubble" — a simile also found in the Egyptian war lore (Cook, 311).

The "strong east wind" of 14:21 is here represented in theological terms as "the blast of your nostrils" (*bᵉrûaḥ 'appeykā*; cf. Ps 18:15), thus confirming the divine agency behind the wind. The result was that the "waters piled up" and the "running, surging, flowing ones" stood "like a heap" (*nēd*; cf. Ps 78:13). (Later the Jordan River will also "heap" up [Jos 3:13, 16].) Meanwhile the waves "congealed" (*qāpᵉ'û*), as though they turned to solid ice. This is the power of God that Israel confesses.

The "deep waters" in vv. 5 and 8 (Heb. plural *tᵉhōmōt*) remind us of the "deep" (Heb. *tᵉhôm*) in Genesis 1:2. There is no implication of a primordial "deep" in Genesis or Exodus, for the root *thm* is also attested in fifteenth century BC Ugaritic as a word for various types of deep waters. Later Scripture writers will link Yahweh's defeat of Egypt, the Red Sea, and the Jordan River with God's slaying of the dragon Rahab (Ps 114), but that does not seem to be the case here.

9 – 10 Part C: The narration of the work of God. Five bicola narrate in dramatic form the staccato phrases that almost simulate the heavy, breathless heaving of the Egyptians as, with what reserve of strength is left, they vow:"I will pursue,""I will overtake," "I will divide the spoils," "I will gorge myself," "I will draw my sword," and "my hand will destroy [lit. and ironically, 'dispossess,' *tôrîšēmô*] them."

But v.10 changes all that; with a mere gust of God's "breath" or "wind" (*rûaḥ*; cf. v.8a), "the sea covered them," and they "sank" (*ṣālᵉlû*; cf. the noun in v.5; perhaps an onomatopoeia that sounds like the gurgle of water as it spins into a whirlpool and is sucked inward; Cole, 124). The word, however, is a *hapax legomenon* and is usually connected with the Akkadian *ṣalālu* ("to sink down"),

hence, “to sleep” (see F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, “The Song of Miriam,” *JNES* 14 [1955]: 247). Like the first strophe (v.5), the second strophe ends with a simile: “They sank like lead in the mighty waters” (v.10b).

11 Strophe III: Part A: Exordium. The song now turns to the theological interpretation and significance of all that was done. Using the formula for incomparability — “Who is like you” (*mî-kāmōkâ*; cf. Pss 35:10; 71:19; 77:13; 89:6; 113:5; Mic 7:18; Labuschagne, 22, 66 – 77, 94 – 97) — Israel proclaims that God’s exclusive uniqueness had been demonstrated and “proven powerful by his [NIV, ‘majestic in’] holiness” (*qōdeš*) and his “awesome wonders” (*nôrāʾ*) or “miracles” (*peleʾ*; see Notes on 4:21). No other “gods” (*ʾēlîm*, whose reality is neither affirmed nor denied at this point; cf. 12:12) can do what the Lord had done. The defeat of the Egyptians is simultaneously a defeat of their gods — who are nothings and nonexistent in every sense!

12 – 13 Part B: Confession. The second-person address of these verses matches vv.7 – 8 and v.17; therefore, these verses belong together and mark the three great works of God in three bicola: the victory at sea, guidance in the wilderness, and the destination of God’s “holy dwelling” (v.13) in Canaan. Thus the heroic deeds at the sea are a pledge that God will fulfill his promise of giving the land. The “earth” (*ʾereṣ*) may here signify Sheol, the grave (cf. 1Sa 28:13; Isa 29:4), for it is actually the sea that “swallowed them” (*bālaʿ*). If it be asked how the “earth” could “swallow” up the Egyptians while the sea actually drowned them, we need only note that when the Egyptians died, they were “swallowed up” by the grave (see N. J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* [BibOr 21; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969], 25 – 26).

But it is God’s “grace” or “unfailing love” (*ḥesed*) that will lead those who have been “redeemed” (*gāʾal*; see comment and Notes on 6:6). The alliterative sequence of the verbs *nāṭîtā* (“you stretched out”), *nāṭîtā* (“you will lead”), and *nēhaltā* (“you will guide”) add to the majesty of the form and unity of the thought.

“Your holy dwelling” (*nʿwēh qodšekā*, lit., “your holy pasture or encampment”) cannot refer to Sinai, since the nations in vv.14 – 15 would not have been affected by that mountain. Nor is Canaan alone meant; but v.17 clearly indicates that Moses has in mind that place in Canaan where God promises to “put his

Name" (Dt 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23 – 24; 16:2, 6, 11; 26:2) in a divinely chosen place (Dt 12:14, 18, 26; 14:25; 16:7, 15 – 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 31:11), i.e., the temple on Mount Zion that will come in the future.

14 – 16a Part C: Anticipation of the work of God. Once again the song shifts from the second person to the third person (cf. vv.4 and 9). A summary statement in v.14a precedes vv.14b – 15, where four of Israel's future enemies are listed: Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan. Thus the "nations" (*ʿammîm*) of v.14a may be the Egyptian designation for the "Asiatics" (*ʿamu*) who occupied southern Palestine (see T. H. Gaster, "Notes on the 'Song of the Sea,'" *ET* 48 [1936 – 37]: 45).

That news of Israel's sensational deliverance from the Egyptian army got around is clearly attested by the prostitute Rahab (Jos 2:10 – 11). Canaan is here named by its residents along the southwestern coastal strip (see Notes on 13:17 for the false charge of an anachronism). The "chiefs" or "princes" (*ʾallûpê*) of Edom introduces another piece of Mosaic identification, for the term is useful in the protodynastic era of Edom (cf. Ge 36:15 – 16), as is the local term of "leaders" or "rams" (*ʾêlê*) of Moab. But all of these peoples and leaders shared one thing in common: fear. Seven expressions for fear are climaxed with the strophe concluding with a simile for "stone-cold silence" (see Nahum Waldman, "A Comparative Note on Exodus 15:14 – 16," *JQR* 66 [1975 – 76]: 189 – 92).

16b Strophe IV: Part A: Exordium. Once more the repetitive parallelism introduces the past and the climactic word — this time the outcome of God's great work at the sea: "until your people pass by" or "cross over" into Canaan (or perhaps the Jordan), even the people who had been "bought" (*qānâ*; see Notes).

17 Part B: Confession. Based on God's parallel handling of Pharaoh and the nations who will oppose Israel's entrance into Canaan, God's people may now anticipate the fulfillment of the patriarchal promise that they will be given — in that future day when Yahweh reigns forever — the land of Canaan as an inheritance. (On the figure of "planting," *nāṭaʿ*, see Pss 44:2; 80:8 – 16). The text moves from the "mountain of [his] inheritance" to a "place" (*mākôn*) "for [his] dwelling," even the "sanctuary" (*miqqᵉdāš*) his "hands established" (see v.13 above).

18 Part C: Anticipation of the work of God. In one final burst of unbounded joy, Moses and the Hebrews rejoice at the prospect of God's universal rule and

reign lasting forever. How temporary in comparison are the reigns of such hardened rulers as Pharaoh and the leaders of state in Canaan and its environs (cf. with Cole, 126, two other Pentateuchal references to Yahweh's kingship prior to the offers to Gideon and to Saul [Nu 23:21 and Dt 33:5])!

19 – 21 A narrative interlude separates this song of Moses from Miriam's song in v.21. Miriam is called a "prophetess" (*nᵉbîʾâ*; cf. also Nu 12:2) and a "sister" of Aaron, even though she is also Moses' sister (v.20). But apparently, as Keil and Delitzsch, 2:56, suggest, Miriam ranks only with Aaron and not with Moses. There will be other prophetesses in Israel (Deborah in Jdg 4:4; Huldah in 2Ki 22:14; Noadiah in Ne 6:14; Isaiah's wife in Isa 8:3; Anna in Lk 2:36). As a prophetess and a leader in Israel (Mic 6:4), Miriam leads the women perhaps in an antiphonal response, repeating the song at the conclusion of each part or strophe, accompanied by timbrels and dancing (see Notes). Thus all attempts to identify Miriam's song as the older and the more original for an alleged expansion in vv.1 – 18 are unnecessary and without evidence.

NOTES

1 Recent scholars argue that Egypt did not use a cavalry at this time.Therefore, רֹכְבוֹ (*rōkᵉbô*, "its rider") should be translated "charioteer"; yet 14:9, 17, 18, 23, 26, 28; 15:19 refer to "horsemen" (*pārāš*) — unless these also are to be rendered "charioteers"!

2 On זִמְרָת (*zimrāt*, "my song"), the pronoun "my" is from the double-duty suffix עזי (*ʿzy*) ("my strength"), but the meaning of *zmrt* is hotly contested. Most scholars posit a *dmr/zmr*, meaning "protect" (Cross and Freedman, "Song of Miriam," 243, n.b; Simon B. Parker, "Exodus xv.2. Again," *VT* 21 [1971]: 373 – 79).We concur with the idea of "protection" and agree with D. N. Freedman's conclusion ("Strophe and Meter in Exodus 15," 176) that the words, "my strength and my protection" are a hendiadys: "Yah is my mighty fortress" or the like.

5 יְכַסְיֻמוֹ (*yᵉkasʿyumô*, "[the deep waters] covered them") involves a triple archaic form. It preserves the final *yod* of the root, uses the archaic suffix (*mô* = *mō*) for the third masculine plural pronominal suffix (also see vv.7, 9 – 10, 12, 15, 17), and uses the imperfect that in reality must be an archaic preterite like the Akkadian

iprus (see other imperfect verbs that are translated as past tenses in vv.6 – 7, 12).

6 According to Cross and Freedman (“Song of Miriam,” 245; cf. v.11), אַדִּרִי (*ne᾽dāṅ*, “majestic”) is an archaic infinitive with the old ending *i* used as “a surrogate for the finite verb” meaning “awesome” (cf. Akkad. *adāru*, “to fear”).

11 בַּקֹּדֶשׁ (*baqōdeš*, “in holiness”) is usually repointed to read *qᵉdôšîm* (“holy ones”) with the LXX, Syrohexaplar, and the Hebrew parallelism to the “gods” in the first part of v.11. But this reasoning does not account for the preposition *b* and the other two adjectival phrases it parallels.

16קָנִיתָ (*qānîtā*, “you bought”) is correctly translated here even though it is also attested in Deuteronomy 32:6 and Proverbs 8:22 as “your Creator” and “you brought me forth” (see also “Creator” in Ge 14:19, **16** 22 and Eve’s name for Cain in Ge 4:1). This concept of purchase fits well with Israel’s “redemption” (*gā᾽al*; Ex 6:6 – 7). As Psalm 74:2 pleads, “Remember the people you purchased [*qānîtā*] of old.” Deuteronomy 32:6 may well contain the same idea.

20 On מְחֹלֹת (*mᵉḥōlōt*, “dancing”), see John H. Eaton, “Dancing in the Old Testament,” *ExpTim* 86 (1974 – 75): 136 – 40.

I. Journey to Sinai (15:22 – 18:27)
1. The Waters of Marah (15:22 – 27)

OVERVIEW

The wilderness itinerary from the Red Sea to Sinai that began in 12:37 now continues. See the Notes for structural characteristics in the long chain of formulas. One of the persistent features of this whole section is the "grumbling" theme (*lûn*, "to murmur"). Except for Joshua 9:18 (a reference to Israel's displeasure with Joshua's handling of the Gibeonite lie) and Psalm 59:15, every occurrence of "grumbling" in the OT is found in Exodus 15 – 17 and Numbers 14; 16 – 17.

Four stories come one after the other as the Israelites march toward Canaan. The first three are stories of rebellion and murmuring, while the fourth is the record of Israel's military exploits over the Amalekites. One would think that the mighty demonstration of God's power at the crossing of the Red Sea would quiet all grumbling and badmouthing of God or his servant Moses, but not so! What most learn from history is that few learn anything from history! As Houtman, 2:299, explains: "A closer look shows that the stories were not written for providing a report of Israel's stay in the desert, but are intended for instruction of the Israel of the future."

> [22]Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. [23]When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) [24]So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"
>
> [25]Then Moses cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became sweet.
>
> There the LORD made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. [26]He said, "If you listen carefully to the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in his eyes, if you pay attention to his commands and keep all his decrees, I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on

the Egyptians, for I am the LORD, who heals you."
27Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

COMMENTARY

22 – 23 There is general agreement on the locality of these first stops made by the Hebrews. The "Desert of Shur" (v.22) is the whole district ranging from Egypt's northeastern frontier eastward into the northwestern quarter of the Sinai Desert and extending southward to the mountains of Sinai. Shur, meaning "wall," is mentioned several times in Genesis (16:7; 20:1; 25:18). In Numbers 33:8, however, this area is called the "Desert of Etham." Perhaps, as Montet, 62, contends, Etham reflects the old Egyptian word for "fort" (*hetem*). It would not have been unusual for a Near Eastern place to have two different names, especially since the meaning of the "wall" may have referred to the defensive line of "forts" along the Egyptian border.

Israel's first stop is traditionally placed by the local Arabs at Ain Musa, the "Springs of Moses," a site not mentioned in any biblical text. It was a source of sweet water about sixteen to eighteen hours' journey north of the site connected with Marah ("bitter"), Israel's first-mentioned stop. This traditional site for crossing the Red Sea is about ten miles south of the northern end of the Red Sea and about one-half mile inland from the coast. The journey from Ain Musa to Marah is about forty miles.

At first the Israelites contend with a stony desert bounded by the deep blue waters of the Gulf of Suez to the west and the mountain chains of el Ruhat at some distance from the shore to the east. After nine more miles they come into the desert plain called el Ati, a white, glaring stretch of sand that turns into hilly country with sand dunes rolling out to the coast. But water is nowhere to be found.

Marah is usually identified with Ain Hawarah, a site several miles inland from the gulf. Ain Hawarah's waters are notoriously salty and brackish. Describing its well, Edward Robinson (*Biblical Researches in Palestine*, 3 vols. [Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1857 – 60], 2:96) says: "The basin is six or eight feet in

diameter, and the water about two feet deep. Its taste is unpleasant, saltish, and somewhat bitter.. . . The Arabs . . . consider it as the worst water in all these regions."

24 The people's grumbling is strong evidence of the historical truthfulness of the wanderings narrative. As a general pattern the grumblings that precede the golden calf incident are raised by genuine need, but those that follow are mainly illegitimate forms of murmuring (so argues Childs, 257 – 64). The unpalatable waters at Marah make a strong enough impression so as to obliterate the Hebrews' memory of all the miracles of Egypt and the parting of the Red Sea — or so it appears. Houtman, 2:306, in a moment of a flair for popularizing the text, suggests the exasperation of the people as they cry out: "There is no way we [are going to] drink this stuff!"

25a The Lord "shows" Moses a tree. This verb is from *yrh*, a root that in the causative conjugation (Hiphil) means "to teach, instruct" and is the same root from which the word "Torah" ("instruction, law") comes. Cassuto, 184, argues this expression points to the purpose of the narrative, for Israel must learn that the *instruction* they need after being freed from Egypt comes from heaven. This, in turn, will prepare them for the reception of the precept of the laws.

What, then, is meant by the fact that the Lord makes "a decree and a law for them"? The singular nouns are meant as collectives (cf. Jos 24:25; 1Sa 30:25), argues Houtman (2:313), probably taken as a hendiadys meaning "a binding statute," with its content (though here unspecified) referring to the requirement to obey Yahweh in light of the whole context.

Ferdinand de Lessups, builder of the Suez Canal, was told by Arab chiefs that they put a thorn bush into some types of water to make it palatable. Others have suggested that certain aromatic plants were used to disguise the bad taste of the water, but the text is clear that God gives Moses special instructions in response to the despair of the people. The tree may have had little more to do with the actual temporary healing of the waters than did the salt in Elisha's healing of the Jericho spring in 2 Kings 2:19 – 22. In both cases most likely only the power of God and a test of obedience are present. Keil argued that the wood as such had no power to heal, but Calvin claimed that though the wood possessed power in itself, God intervened directly so there would be enough purification or enough

water to serve all the people. Ibn Ezra saw these miracles as "contrast parallel" of the first plague: the sweet water of the Nile was made putrid while here the putrid water is made sweet (Houtman, 2:308).

25b – 27 This miracle is connected with a promise; viz., from now on obedience to commands and statutes will bring healing, both physically and morally. God allows Israel to go three days without water to "test" (*nāsâ*, v.25b; cf. the same root as "Massah" in 17:7) them. God later tests Israel at Meribah (17:1 – 7), Sinai (20:20), Taberah (Nu 11:3; 13:26 – 33), and elsewhere; but it is "to humble [them] and to test [them] in order to know what was in [their] heart[s]" (Dt 8:2). However, the "diseases" (v.26) God "put on" the Egyptians will afflict Israel only if they disobey and rebel against God (Dt 28:27).

Israel journeys to "Elim" (v.27), located in the large and beautiful valley of Gharandel, about seven miles south of Ain Hawarah. This tract of land lies between the wilderness of Shur and the wilderness of Sin and contains two other wadis besides the Wadi Gharandel, viz., Useit and Tayibeh. In the rainy season there is a constant torrent of water running down to the Red Sea that slows down in the dry season. The grass is thick and high, and there are many tamarisks, acacias, and palm trees in this region. The miracle here is that a mere twelve springs can provide enough water for such a huge crowd and that seventy palms can flourish in such a desert!

NOTES

22 The wilderness itinerary has a stereotyped formula that appears in 12:37; 13:20; 15:22, 27; 16:1; 17:1; 19:2; Numbers 11:35; 12:16; 20:1, 22; 21:4, 10 – 13, 16, 18 – 20; 22:1. Usually there are two principal elements in each formula (see Coats, "Wilderness Itinerary," 135 – 52; see comment on 12:37): a departure location and an arrival location. The first element usually uses the verb *nāsaʿ* in the third masculine plural imperfect with a *waw* consecutive and a place name with a *mem* ("from"); the second element has wider variations, but the most common verb is *ḥānan*, with *bôʾ*, *yāṣaʾ*, *hāyâ*, and *yāšab* being used along with *betʾel*, *nēged*, *ʿal*, or *lipnê*.

23 מָרָתָה ... מִמָּרָה (*mārātâ ... mimmārâ*, "Marah . . . bitter") is a wordplay that brings out the association of the bitter water with the name given to that place. Notice the

passive construction implying that this name was already associated with this place.

24 וַיִּלֹּנוּ (*wayyillōnû*, "they grumbled") represents the negative theme of Israel's apostasy in the wilderness (as seen in Ne 9:13 – 18; Ps 106:13 – 33; Eze 20:13), which is often contrasted with the positive theme **24** of the wilderness as the time of Israel's honeymoon with Yahweh (Dt 32:10 – 14; Jer 2:2 – 3; Hos 2:14 [16]; 11:1, 3 – 4). But these two themes are no more antithetical to each other than the prophets' combined word of judgment and hope. On the word לוּן (*lûn*, "to grumble, murmur"), see the fine discussion by Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness*, 21 – 28.

26 On כָּל־הַמַּחֲלָה (*kol-hammaḥᵉlâ*, "any of the diseases"), see S. I. McMillen, *None of These Diseases* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1963).

2. The Manna and the Quail (16:1 – 36)

[1]The whole Israelite community set out from Elim and came to the Desert of Sin, which is between Elim and Sinai, on the fifteenth day of the second month after they had come out of Egypt. [2]In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. [3]The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the LORD's hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death."

[4]Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions. [5]On the sixth day they are to prepare what they bring in, and that is to be twice as much as they gather on the other days."

[6]So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites,"In the evening you will know that it was the LORD who brought you out of Egypt, [7]and in the morning you will see the glory of the LORD, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we, that you should grumble against us?" [8]Moses also said, "You will know that it was the LORD when he gives you meat to eat in the evening and all the bread you want in the morning, because he has heard your grumbling against him. Who are we? You are not

grumbling against us, but against the LORD."

[9]Then Moses told Aaron, "Say to the entire Israelite community, 'Come before the LORD, for he has heard your grumbling.' "

[10]While Aaron was speaking to the whole Israelite community, they looked toward the desert, and there was the glory of the LORD appearing in the cloud.

[11]The LORD said to Moses, [12]"I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them, 'At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.' "

[13]That evening quail came and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. [14]When the dew was gone, thin flakes like frost on the ground appeared on the desert floor. [15]When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was.

Moses said to them, "It is the bread the LORD has given you to eat. [16]This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Each one is to gather as much as he needs. Take an omer for each person you have in your tent.' "

[17]The Israelites did as they were told; some gathered much, some little. [18]And when they measured it by the omer, he who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little. Each one gathered as much as he needed.

[19]Then Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until morning."

[20]However, some of them paid no attention to Moses; they kept part of it until morning, but it was full of maggots and began to smell. So Moses was angry with them.

[21]Each morning everyone gathered as much as he needed, and when the sun grew hot, it melted away. [22]On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much — two omers for each person — and the leaders of the community came and reported this to Moses. [23]He said to them, "This is what the LORD commanded: 'Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the LORD. So bake what you want to bake and boil what you want to boil. Save whatever is left and keep it until morning.' "

[24]So they saved it until morning, as Moses commanded, and it did not stink or get maggots in it. [25]"Eat it today," Moses said, "because today is a Sabbath to the LORD. You will not find any of it on the ground today. [26]Six

days you are to gather it, but on the seventh day, the Sabbath, there will not be any."

[27]Nevertheless, some of the people went out on the seventh day to gather it, but they found none. [28]Then the LORD said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and my instructions? [29]Bear in mind that the LORD has given you the Sabbath; that is why on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Everyone is to stay where he is on the seventh day; no one is to go out." [30]So the people rested on the seventh day.

[31]The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. [32]Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded: 'Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generations to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the desert when I brought you out of Egypt.' "

[33]So Moses said to Aaron, "Take a jar and put an omer of manna in it. Then place it before the LORD to be kept for the generations to come."

[34]As the LORD commanded Moses, Aaron put the manna in front of the Testimony, that it might be kept. [35]The Israelites ate manna forty years, until they came to a land that was settled; they ate manna until they reached the border of Canaan.

[36](An omer is one tenth of an ephah.)

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 The "fifteenth day of the second month" (v.1) was exactly one month after the Hebrews' departure from Egypt (12:6, 31). Since Numbers 33:5 – 11 mentions seven places of encampment and only one journey of three days' duration (Ex 15:22), it is evident that either the Hebrews have stayed at several of these places for a number of days or they have camped in a number of other unmentioned places or areas. Cook, 316, notes the peculiarity of the Hebrew text in v.1, which is literally: "They set out from Elim and the whole Israelite community came to the Desert of Sin." This implies that they may have left Elim in various detachments and finally assembled as a complete group when they all reached the Desert of Sin.

The location of the Desert of Sin is problematic. Numbers 33:12 lists Dophkah ("smeltery") as the next stop after the Desert of Sin. Dophkah probably

refers to the Egyptian turquoise and copper mining center at Serabit el-Khadim in the Eighteenth and Twentieth Dynasties, thus placing the Desert of Sin south and east of Elim. So the Desert of Sin may be located either (1) along the coastal plain, el Markha (a site favorable to avoiding the Egyptian miners' settlements, to the descent of the quail near the shore of the gulf, and to certain details in ch. 18) or (2) at the inland Debbet er Ramleh, which forms a crescent between Serabit el-Khadim and the et-Tih plateau (a site in direct line between Elim and Sinai, a better-watered area, and called the desert of et Tih, a name similar in sound to the Hebrew Desert of Sin). The second location is preferred by most scholars today.

This time the people "grumble" (v.2) about the amount of food and the lack of meat (v.3). Suddenly Egypt seems all peaches and cream (actually pots of meat and all you could eat — in their idiom) rather than bondage and slave drivers. With a twisted piety and a condescending reference to Yahweh's name, the Israelites pretend they would prefer being victims in Egypt to being the recipients of so many miracles — and all this hardship. The provisions from Egypt may have lasted these thirty days, but their supplies are undoubtedly exhausted. The fact that the Hebrews have just witnessed the miraculous hand of God once more does not rule out another act of rebellion.

Some scholars note that the earlier part of this text closely links meat and bread, but that combination seems suddenly to give way in favor of discussing only the bread. For this reason, they again solve this supposed problem by posing a composite text of several layers from several sources — an ever-ready, easy-out hypothesis that implies the editors were less capable than we moderns in the ability to detect careless splicing of allegedly separate texts. This division of a meat tradition and a manna tradition is artificial, for while both are introduced as the reason for the grumbling, the solution to each comes in separate but understandably different venues.

4 – 5 God graciously answers one aspect of the Hebrews' grumbling by raining down on them "bread from heaven" (v.4; cf. Ne 9:15; Ps 78:24; Jn 6:31 – 51). But there will be a "test" (the root is *nsh*) to see whether the people will obey and trust God by faith.

The answer to the question, "Why does God need to test them — God's

knowledge cannot be that limited, can it?"— is that this is merely a conventional way in the OT of depicting God in terms that mortals can understand (as in Ge 22:12; Job 1:1 – 2:8). The test brings out from the human actions precisely what God already knows, but what he also wants to demonstrate to his people — the very same point.

Already prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments, the seventh day is to be set apart to the Lord because of its establishment in the creation ordinances in Genesis 2:2 – 3. Here we find the first appearance of the observance of the Sabbath day in Israel's history. On the sixth day, the people must gather twice the daily amount of manna (v.5). It is not to be left or eaten in the form they gather; instead, it is to be prepared by milling and baking (cf. Nu 11:8). Since God is the one who supplies the food and now pauses from his work, the Hebrews ought to refrain from gathering on the seventh day.

6 – 8 The first part of v.8 explains that Israel's lapse of memory will be restored that very evening (vv.6 – 7a), when God sends them food in a way yet to be announced; then they will *know* (here is that evangelistic word from the plagues) that it is the Lord! The second part of v.8 elaborates the inner meaning of the words in v.7b: your grumbling is not directed at your leaders, but ultimately your complaint is against God. Hence we have the theology and abiding principles to be gained from Israel's appreciation (and ours!), for what God does here is placed in front of the actual narration of the events.

9 – 12 Moses instructs Aaron to summon the congregation. They are to "come [near] before the LORD" (v.9; see Notes). After the Sinai legislation this instruction means that Israel is to gather before the tabernacle; but this text antedates those times. Consequently, v.10 explains that they are to look toward the desert where the Lord appears in the cloud (on this cloud, see comment on 13:21 – 22). The meaning of this symbol of the real presence of God connected with the splendor of this cloud and fire will be clarified in 24:15 – 17. Once again, as in vv.6 and 12, Israel "will know that I am the LORD your God" (see comment on 7:4 – 5).

13 – 18 The events describing the gift of quail are similar in form but separate in time from the narrative in Numbers 11:4 – 22, 31 – 33. Quail (cf. Ps 78:27 – 31) are a well-known migratory bird (*Coturnix Vulgeris*). They usually fly in

vast numbers in the spring to the northern regions and return in the fall. Because of their prolonged flight over the Red Sea, they land exhausted on the shore of the Sinai Peninsula.

Not only do the quail "come up" (see Notes on v.13) from the horizon, so also does the dew "come up." When the dew evaporates, beneath it appear "thin flakes like frost on the ground . . . on the desert floor" (v.14). L. S. Bodenheimer ("The Manna of Sinai," *BA* 10 [1947]: 2 – 6) contends that this substance is really the honeydew excretion of two types of insects or aphids that live on the numerous tamarisk trees in the region. It is a sweet, sugary, transparent substance that turns white, brown, or yellow and that is rich in carbohydrates but poor in nitrogen (also see Marston Bates, "Insects in the Diet," *American Scholar* 29 [1959 – 60]: 46 – 48). Another suggestion for the origination of this material is to equate it with the lichen *Leanora Esculenta*, which grows on rocks about the size of a pea and is light enough to be blown about by the wind.

Both of the above suggestions run into trouble: Bodenheimer cannot account for the stinking decay or the melting and so promptly relegates these textual features to a misinterpretation or an interpolation in the text. Furthermore, the manna continues to provide food for the Hebrews for almost forty years, not just for the three to six weeks in July and August as Bodenheimer's suggestion would necessitate. It is also produced in quantities far exceeding what either of these methods could possibly deliver. Thus we agree with Raw-linson, 2:40: Manna "must be regarded as a peculiar substance, miraculously created for a special purpose, but similar in certain respects to certain known substances which are still produced in the Sinai region." On the Hebrews' question, "What is it?" (v.15), see the Notes.

Each family unit is to gather "an omer," about two quarts or one-tenth of a bushel (v.36), for each person in its tent (v.16). Verse 18 is used by the apostle Paul as an illustration for Christians to share with one another just as the Hebrews pooled the manna everyone collected (2Co 8:15).

19 – 21 In spite of the warning that God is testing (v.4) the people by ordering them not to leave any manna until the next morning, some "pay no attention to Moses" (vv.19 – 20). This test is to remind the Hebrews that they do not live by bread alone but by "every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD" (Dt

8:3). Furthermore, it teaches them that even their daily bread is a gift from God, on whom they are therefore to live in daily dependence.

22 – 30 The day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord, did not originate with the Sinaitic legislation, which will come shortly, for even in 20:8 – 11 the Sabbath is grounded in the ordinances of creation (Ge 2:2 – 3). Genesis 29:27 knows of a bridal "week" of seven days in Jacob's time (though a heptad symbolic in this case of seven years). Many compare this ordinance to the Babylonian *šapattu*. But no one has been able to demonstrate that Israel borrowed her concept of the Sabbath from Babylon — the correspondences are just too weak. On the contrary, this pattern of six days for gathering and one day of rest is ordered by God (v.5).The seventh day is to be a "day of " cessation or "rest" (v.23); therefore, food preparations for the morrow are to be made on the sixth day. But when some fail to obey (v.27), the Lord groans, "How long will you [plural] refuse to keep my commands and my instructions?" Only then do the people "rest" (lit., "stop, cease") on the seventh day (v.30).

23 Wellhausen (as noted by Houtman, 2:349) decided that since manna could not take the heat of the sun but could be baked or boiled, the text must be representing an incongruity. Analogies, such as a yoke of an egg that is liquid in low temperature becoming hard when heated, will not help here. The fact is that all natural explanations for manna fail to meet all the criteria given in the text, so its supernatural and miraculous nature offers the best explanation.

31 The name and description of manna is also given in Numbers 11:6 – 9. Coriander seed is a small lobular grain that is white or yellowish gray and is used for seasoning (cf. our use of caraway and sesame seeds). Numbers 11:7 adds that it "looked like resin" and, according to the older versions, that it had the color of "bdellium" (KJV; = pearl?). Its taste was like wafers made of honey or "something made with olive oil" (Nu 11:8); it could be ground in a mill, crushed in a mortar, cooked in a pot, or made into cakes (Nu 11:8).

32 – 36 At some subsequent time Moses orders that this giving of the manna be memorialized by placing some of it into the ark of the Testimony. The ark has not been revealed, much less constructed, at this time; therefore v.32 is best put, "this is what the Lord *had* commanded." In support of this position is the historical note in v.35, which describes the eating of manna over the next forty

years; thus these verses are written by Moses at the end of the wanderings. To claim that this "sudden and anachronistic" reference to "the [ark of the] Testimony" means that "Moses did not write these words" (Enns, 327) is to claim too much, for even though Joshua 5:10 – 12 says that the manna stopped as they celebrated the Passover in Gilgal on the other side of the Jordan, the text of Exodus 16:31 only takes the story up to "the border of Canaan." Moses could have written this piece as a final addition to his work, or Joshua may have done so, for God told him to add many things to the book of the law (Jos 24:26).

NOTES

1 On כָּל־עֲדַת (*kol-ᶜadat*, "whole community"), see the Notes on 12:3. In מִדְבַּר־סִין (*midbar-sîn*, "Desert of Sin"), Sin may be derived from the Hebrew סְנֶה (*sᵉneh*, "thorn bush"; mentioned in 17:1 and Nu 33:11 – 12). This must not be confused with the Desert of Zin (ˆxi, *s.in*), which is directly south of Judah near Kadesh Barnea, far to the north of Sinai, and is spelled with a different Hebrew consonant.

4 אֲנַסֶּנּוּ (*ᵃnassennû*, "I will test them") is a cognate term to the place name in 17:7: מַסָּה (*massâ*, "Massah"). There Israel מַסֹּתָם (*nassōtam*, "tested") the Lord.

This reference to God's law — בְּתוֹרָתִי- (*bᵉtôrātî*, "my instructions, my law") — is a clear reference to the fact that God holds people accountable to his law even before its fuller revelation at Sinai (cf. Ge 2:2 – 3; 39:9; see also Ex 18:20).

7 The כְּבוֹד יהוה (*kᵉbôd yhwh*, "glory of the LORD") is the sheer weight, gravity (*kābēd*, "to be heavy," then "to glorify") of his divine presence. The presence of the Lord is so central and significant in the Mosaic era that four other forms speak of it besides the glory of the Lord: the face (*pānîm*) of the Lord, the angel (*maᵓak*) of the Lord, the name (*šēm*) of the Lord, and the tabernacle in which God will dwell (*šākan*) among them.

On the repeated references to grumbling, see comment and Notes on 15:24.The verb לון (*lûn*), whether in the Niphal or Hiphil form, means "to express resentment, dissatisfaction, anger, or complaint by grumbling in half-muted

tones of hostile opposition.” Here it is against God or his appointed leaders.

9 קִרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה (*qirbû lipnê yhwh,* “Come before the LORD”) illustrates one of the most important words in the theology of worship: “to draw near, come” (GK 7928). For some, such as Felix Asensio (“Una faceta biblica del ‘acercamiento’ humanodivino en el A. Testamento,” *EstBib* 36 [1977]: 5 – 19), it almost serves as an integrating theme for all theology. As a verb,*qārab* means to approach God for service to him; as an adjective,*qārab* states the goal achieved — a spiritual state of sensing the closeness of his presence; and as a noun, *qirbâ* denotes nearness to God on a spiritual plane.

13 וַתַּעַל (*wattaʿal,* “came,” lit., “came up” [from the horizon]) matches the same verb in v.14: “the dew *was* gone” or “went up.” הַשְּׂלָו (*haśśᵉlāw,* “the quail”) has the article since their appearance is a usual occurrence and something fairly familiar to the Israelites.

14 מְחֻסְפָּס (*mᵉḥuspās,* “flakes” or “round”) is found only here in the OT. The Ugaritic verb *h.sp*, like the Hebrew *h.aìsap*, means “to uncover.” The meaning of this noun is uncertain.

15 מָן הוּא … מָה הוּא (*mān hîʾ … mâ-hûʾ,* “What is it? . . . What it was”) shows why Israel calls this bread from heaven מָן (*mān,* v.31) or “manna.” Some object that the Hebrew word for “what?” is *mâ*, not *man*ì . The solution is that there is an old Semitic article, *maìn* (meaning “what?”), that appears as *manna* in the Palestinian Amarna Letters; therefore, the etymology of *mān* must not be attributed to late Aramaic forms. The LXX translation of this verse is *ti estin touto* (“What is this?”).

16 עֹמֶר (*ʿōmer,* “an omer”) is a dry measure consisting of one-tenth of an ephah (v.36) or a bushel.That is a little more than two quarts or 2.3 liters. אִישׁ לְפִי אָכְלוֹ (*ʾîš lᵉpî ʾokᵉlô,* “as much as he needs”) is literally, “each according to his eating.” The identical Hebrew expression appears in 12:4.

23 The form שַׁבָּתוֹן (*šabbātôn,* “day of rest”) of the Hebrew Shabbath or Sabbath (שַׁבָּת *šabbāt*) is reflected in the Greek of Hebrews 4:9 as *sabbatismos*, meaning “rest.” The shorter form is reflected in the Greek *sab-baton* in Matthew 12:5, 8.

34 The later instruction “in front of the Testimony,” which comes after the tabernacle is built, refers to the “ark of the Testimony,” by way of an ellipsis, simply as “the Testimony” (see also 30:36; Nu 17:4 – 10). See comments on 25:10 – 22.

3. The Waters of Meribah (17:1 – 7)

OVERVIEW

Literary-critical scholars are inclined to assign two separate sources for this pericope, usually based on the two names of Meribah and Massah. However, they differ widely on the precise names, sources, and reasons for making such divisions in the text. But without any external evidence, the text as it exists before us presents a holistic picture: a place called Rephidim acquires a new set of names because of the bad behavior of the Hebrews. From that date on, the new names for this site keep the memory of Israel’s misbehavior alive for future generations, as well as for those very same people, so that it will not be repeated.

[1]The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling
from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim,
but there was no water for the people to drink. [2]So they quarreled with
Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses replied,“Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD
to the test?”

[3]But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against
Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and
our children and livestock die of thirst?”

[4]Then Moses cried out to the LORD, “What am I to do with these
people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

[5]The LORD answered Moses, “Walk on ahead of the people. Take with
you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which
you struck the Nile, and go. [6]I will stand there before you by the rock at
Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to
drink.” So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. [7]And he called

the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?”

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 Before the Hebrews come to Rephidim (v.1), they rest at Dophkah and Alush (Nu 33:12 – 14). Rephidim, however, is best identified as the large Wadi Refayid, in southwest Sinai, instead of Wadi Feiran. They hope to find water, but the wadi is already dry. This situation presents us with a third narrative on the Lord’s provision for Israel’s needs in the desert.

As a result of this disappointment, the people “quarrel” (see Notes) with Moses, demanding: “Give [plural form] us water to drink” (v.2). The verb “to quarrel” (from the root *ryb*) is the key word in the passage and explains one of the names for this place, “Meribah” (v.7), which means “quarrel, strife, argument.” It is a stronger word for complaining than the word for “grumble.” What was a gracious gift of God through Moses’ hands is now demanded as a magical solution to their problem: “Give it to us.”

Significantly, Israel has traveled to Rephidim “as the LORD commanded” (lit., “at the mouth of Yahweh”). Thus God in his wisdom has directed his people to move from the Desert of Sin (where they hungered but afterwards were satisfied) to Rephidim (where they thirst).

Instead of submitting to the *tests* God conducts for them (see comments on 15:25; 16:4), Israel begins to *test* the Lord (Pss 78:56; 106:7, 14, 25, 29)! God’s people tempt or test their Lord when they distrust his kindness and providential care of them and grumble against him and/or his leaders. Moses will later warn (Dt 6:16) that people are not to put God to the test as they did at Massah. Even Isaiah 7:11 – 12 does not change this rule, for Ahaz’s pious disclaimer is not for religious reasons, but for political ones. Furthermore, Ahaz was invited by God to ask for a sign from heaven or earth.

3 This verse explains in more detail the theme announced in the previous verse(s). It is best trans-lated: “Since the people were thirsty for water.” Moses concludes that when the Hebrews complain to him, they are actually putting the

Lord to the test. But how can this be true? The context supplies the answer, for according to 16:8b, rebellion against God's leader is the same thing as rebellion against God! To hold Moses responsible for the exodus and all that has occurred since is equal to a denial of the work of God, who is the real leader in the exodus and all that has transpired (16:6 – 8).

4 – 7 One of Moses' most characteristic and praiseworthy traits is that he takes his difficulties to the Lord (v.4; 15:25; 32:30; 33:8; Nu 11:2, 11; 12:13; 14:13 – 19). In his exasperation he pleads, "What am I to do with these [*hazzeh*, lit., 'this'] people?" The demonstrative pronoun *this* has the same undertone of alienation and distance that is found in God's word in Haggai 1:2: "This [*hazzeh*] people say," rather than the expected "my people say."Thus, they are ready to stone Moses — an angry mob's solution to an irritating problem. Moses "cries out!" (as he did in 15:25). It is a desperate cry for help, for things are getting out of hand. The people are going to stone him any moment now if Yahweh does not interfere.

The Lord does not take sides in this exchange but moves directly by sending relief. Moses, along with a few of the elders, is to go out in front of the people — presumably farther down the wadi (v.5). There where the pillar of the cloud stands — the symbol of God's own presence and ever-present source of power — Moses is to "strike" (*hikkîtā*) "[on] the rock" (*baṣṣûr*) just as he had "struck" (*hikkîtā*) the Nile River. Striking the Nile (7:17, 20) in the first plague, however, signaled an interruption in that nation's water supply, whereas this striking will signal the commencement of the flow of waters (v.6). As in 14:19 – 20, what was darkness or death to Egypt will now be light or life to Israel because of the grace of God.

The Lord's presence (v.6) is the prerequisite for receiving the gift of water. True, Moses must strike the rock, but Yahweh's intervention is what makes the miracle work. The text emphatically notes that the elders witness this event (v.6) so they can attest to the validity of the miracle!

This incident must not be confused with a similar episode that comes near the conclusion of Israel's forty years of journeying in Numbers 20:1 – 13. In this later account, the glory of the Lord is not present, and Moses is explicitly instructed there *not* to strike the rock but only *to speak* to it. This shows that the only connection between Israel's need and God's supply is the divine word.

True, they also name that place “the waters of Meribah” (Nu 20:13), but the symmetry and naming may indeed be deliberate to emphasize the purpose in allowing the incidents and in directing that they be recorded as Scripture. God’s people are prone to grumbling at the first hint of adversity, no matter how abundant and spectacular may be the evidence of his power.

Thus the dual name brings out both the people’s testing of God (*Massah*, “test”) and quarreling (*Meribah*, “contention, strife”; NIV mg., “quarreling”; v.7). In fewer than six months the Israelites have witnessed ten plagues, the pillar of cloud and fire, the opening and shutting of the Red Sea, the miraculous sweetening of the water, and the sending of food and meat from heaven; yet their real question came down to this: “Is the LORD among us or not?”

NOTES

2 וַיָּרֶב (*wayyāreb*, “So they quarreled”) can be in strife, contention, or even litigation in words or, less frequently, in deeds (Ge 49:23; Ex 21:18). This is a dominant word in the prophets’ vocabulary to describe God’s litigation and case against his people. Although מָה (*mâ*) means “what?” in most contexts, in this adverbial usage here it means “why?” (see also 14:15; 2Ki 6:33; 7:3; Ps 42:5[6]; Song 8:4).

6 Ironically, at the very moment the Hebrews ask whether the Lord really is in their midst (v.7), he says, הִנְנִי עֹמֵד לְפָנֶיךָ שָׁם (*hinnî ʿōmēd lᵉpānêykā šām*, “Behold, I will stand before you there”). He will be standing there on the rock, apparently having moved his *shekinah* glory from in front of them in the desert to on top of the rock alongside Moses and the elders. This christophany enabled Paul accurately to refer to Christ as being present here as *the* Rock (cf. 1Co 10:4 with Dt 32:30 – 31, 37).

Even though Horeb is an alternate name for Sinai (e.g., 3:1), עַל־הַצּוּר בְּחֹרֵב (*ʿal-haṣṣûr bᵉḥōrēb*, “by the rock at Horeb”) treats Horeb as the whole region in that it speaks of “at” or “in” Horeb. Note that the writer speaks of the rock (*ṣûr*), not the mountain (*har*).

4. The War with Amalek (17:8 – 16)

[8]The Amalekites came and attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. [9]Moses said to Joshua, “Choose some of our men and go out to fight the Amalekites. Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill with the staff of God in my hands.”

[10]So Joshua fought the Amalekites as Moses had ordered, and Moses, Aaron and Hur went to the top of the hill. [11]As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. [12]When Moses’ hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up — one on one side, one on the other — so that his hands remained steady till sunset. [13]So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.

[14]Then the LORD said to Moses,“Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.”

[15]Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. 16He said, “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.”

COMMENTARY

8 The Amalekites live in the desert south of Canaan around Kadesh (Ge 14:7), otherwise known as the northern part of the Negev (Nu 13:29; 14:25, 43). Amalek was the son of Eliphaz (Esau’s eldest boy) by a concubine named Timna (Ge 36:12) and became a “clan” or “chief ” in the tribe of Esau (Ge 36:15). Thus the Amalekites are distant cousins of the Israelites.

Most likely these people know about the promise of the land of Canaan given to Esau’s twin brother, Jacob; therefore, if they do remember this promise and take it seriously, they should not be feeling any threat to their interests in the Negev. After all, the promise was to be a means of blessing Amalek along with all the other nations (Ge 12:3) if only they, like Abraham, would believe. Instead, they come and attack Israel at Rephidim — some distance south of the north-central district of the Sinai, where they live. What causes Amalek’s attack on Israel is not stated. Is it a remnant of the hostility of Jacob and Esau? Or is it

fear that the balance of power is being upset in the area? We do not know for sure (see v.14 comments).

Amalek's assault on Israel draws God's anger on two counts. (1) They fail to recognize the hand and plan of God in Israel's life and destiny (even the more-removed Canaanites of Jericho were given plenty to think about when they heard about the exodus — Jos 2:10); and (2) the first targets of their killing were the sick, aged, and tired of Israel who lagged behind the line of march (Dt 25:17 – 19). Thus Amalek becomes the "first among the nations" (Nu 24:20) — in this case, to attack Israel. They are placed in juxtaposition with another group of Gentiles in the next chapter (Jethro's Midianites) who do believe in Israel's God. These two chapters illustrate two kingdoms and two responses to God's grace from the Gentile world.

9 To direct the battle against the Amalekites, Moses commissions a young man (perhaps about forty-five years old) from the tribe of Ephraim (Joseph's son) named Hoshea (Nu 13:8), the son of Nun (1Ch 7:27) — later renamed Joshua (see Notes). He is to muster an army to fight against the Amalekites while Moses, with God's staff in his hand, will stand on top of one of the nearby hills overlooking the plain. Both elements are to be operating: (1) the sword in Joshua's hand and (2) the staff (symbol of divine intervention) in Moses' hand. Once again divine sovereignty and human responsibility are linked in carrying out God's will.

10 – 13 Aaron and Hur go with Moses to the top of the hill. Hur, here mentioned for the first time, is again mentioned with Aaron in 24:14, where Moses places both of them in charge of the camp while he and Joshua go up the mountain of God. Whether this is the same Hur who descended from Judah through Caleb (1Ch 2:18 – 20) and whose grandson Bezalel built the tabernacle (1Ch 2:19 – 20; Ex 31:2; 35:30; 38:22) is difficult to say. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.54 [2.4]) preserves a Jewish tradition that Hur is the husband of Moses' sister, Miriam.

"As long as" (see Notes on v.11) Moses holds up his hands (presumably with his staff alternately in one or the other), Joshua and his men are victorious. However, whenever he lowers his hands through weariness, the Amalekites forge ahead in the battle. This gesture is not merely for psychological effect to

inspire the troops every time they glance up the hill (S. R. Hirsch, *The Pentateuch: Exodus* [2d ed.; Gates-head, Eng.: Judaica, 1973], 2:233). Nor does the text specifically claim that Moses prays while his hands are raised (the more traditional explanation). Rather, Moses' outstretched arms primarily symbolize his appeal to God. God commanded Moses on previous occasions, "Stretch out your hand" (*nṭēh ʾet -yādᵉkā*) with the staff (9:22 – 23; 10:12 – 13; 14:16; note that in 10:21 – 22 only the hand was stretched out).

This staff is no magic wand. Like all OT institutions, the external and visible symbol means nothing unless (1) it is divinely appointed and (2) the obedient use of the external form is accompanied by the internal and invisible motions of the heart and spirit of a man. Thus the prophetic-symbolic action of the constantly upraised hands do signal the fervent prayers of the heart of Moses as he witnesses the battle. As Bush, 2:220, aptly remarks,"The whole narrative . . . conclusively shows that God designed to teach Israel that the hand of Moses, with whom [Israel] had just been chiding, contributed more to their safety than their own hands; his rod more than their weapons." Finally the lengthy battle comes to an end, with Joshua as victor.

14 The account of this battle, in which the powerful presence of the Lord plays an important role, is to be written down on a scroll (*sēper*) and continually reiterated for Joshua's benefit. There are five notices in the Pentateuch in which Moses writes something at the Lord's command: here; 24:4, 7; 34:27, 28; Numbers 33:1 – 2; and Deuteronomy 31:9, 22, 24. Some OT scholars have questioned these notices by alleging that writing was not invented until after Moses' day. It has since become apparent from archaeological evidence that by Moses' day people had already been writing for over a millennium and a half!

Amalek will pay dearly for its awful deed. The psalmist (Ps 83:4) links Amalek's motives with those of other nations: " 'Come,' they say, 'let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more.' " But it will be measured out to them as they have threatened to do to Israel. Elsewhere in the OT this judgment is called *ḥērem* ("a ban"; GK 3051), that is, an involuntary dedication of a total people for destruction after they have steadfastly resisted the goodness of God for generations. This sentence of total extinction is not carried out until Saul's day (1Sa 15), but Saul fails to do what God said. David continues the action (2Sa 1:1 – 8:12); and Amalekites may still have been living in Esther's day, if Haman indeed is proven to have been an Amalekite. We learn

in Esther 3:1 about “Haman the Agagite,” which suggests that Haman was of Amalekite ancestry.

15 – 16 Whether “The LORD is my Banner” (*yhwh nissî*, “Yahweh Nissi”) is the name of the altar (cf. Jacob in Ge 33:20) or a title for God himself cannot be known for certain. The result is the same in either case. The word for “banner” (*nēs*; GK 5812) reflects the root “to be high, raised, conspicuous.” The allusion is to lifting up the staff as a standard and a testimony to his power. The victory, then, is the Lord’s, just as the war was his. There is no such thing as a “holy war” in the OT, but there are “wars of Yahweh.”

The true interpretation of v.16 is difficult because of the unusual spelling for the word “throne” (*kēs*). Most scholars emend the text (following the seventeenth-century commentator J. Clericus) to read *nēs* (“banner”). Cassuto, 207, supposes the meaning “plan” for (*kēs*). (from the root *kāsaʾ*, “to count, reckon”). The problem is that some versions (e.g., the Samar., Syr., Vul., Onqelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, *Neofiti I*) read “throne,” even though it should be spelled *kissēʾ*; and the grammar of the present text does not fit easily. The best solution (taking the more difficult textual reading) is to see *kēsyāh* as a shortened form of *kissēʾ-yāh* (“throne of Yah[weh]”). The text then reads: “truly [*kî*], the hand is toward [*ʿal*] the throne of the Lord,” i.e., in a supplicating position. An alternative rendering is, “because [*kî*] a hand is against [*ʿal*] the throne of the LORD.” This latter reading better fits the context of v.14.

NOTES

9 יְהוֹשֻׁעַ (*yᵉhôšuaʿ*, “Joshua”) is הוֹשֵׁעַ (*hôšēaʿ*) in Numbers 13:8. The Greek form, Ἰησοῦς (*Iēsous*), is the same name as Jesus (see Ac 7:45; Heb 4:8).The form “Joshua” was given to him by Moses when he was sent out as one of the spies (Nu 13:16). Exodus 17:9, then, either reflects the fact that Moses wrote this narrative later in his life, after sending out the spies, or it is a later textual modernization of this name.

11 Both the verbs “to hold up” and “to lower” are introduced by the perfect וְהָיָה (*wᵉhāyâ*, “as long as”) with the *waw*, and both are preceded by כַּאֲשֶׁר (*kaʾᵃšer*, lit., “as that”). Continued or frequentative action is clearly denoted.

12 כְּבֵדִים (*kᵉbēdîm*, lit., “tired ones”; NIV, “grew tired”) uses a masculine plural even though “hands” is feminine in Hebrew. This may be an archaic form for the usual dual ending, *kᵉbēdayim* (Cassuto, 205). The word יָד (*yād*, “hand”) occurs in vv.9 – 16 seven times. אֱמוּנָה (*ʾᵉmûnâ*, “remained steady”) is the usual word for “faithfulness,” but this passage affords a great word picture of what is involved: steadfastness and patience under severe trials.

13 וַיַּחֲלֹשׁ (*wayyaḥᵃlōš*, “overcame”) is a rare Hebrew form that on the basis of Aramaic usage can be translated “mowed down, disabled, prostrated.”

14 מָחֹה אֶמְחֶה (*māḥōh ʾᵉmḥeh*, “completely erase”) is literally, “wiping, I will wipe.” The sentence is emphatic with a ring of paronomasia to help the condemned remember it all the better. The presence of the definite article with בַּסֵּפֶר (*bassēper*, “on the scroll”) expresses a special or well-known scroll with similar information collected at God’s direction.

5. The Wisdom of Jethro (18:1 – 27)

[1]Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of
everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the
LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt.
[2]After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro
received her [3]and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses
said, “I have become an alien in a foreign land”; [4]and the other was named
Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the
sword of Pharaoh.”
[5]Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, together with Moses’ sons and wife, came
to him in the desert, where he was camped near the mountain of God.
[6]Jethro had sent word to him,“I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to
you with your wife and her two sons.”
[7]So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and
kissed him. They greeted each other and then went into the tent. [8]Moses
told his father-in-law about everything the LORD had done to Pharaoh and
the Egyptians for Israel’s sake and about all the hardships they had met
along the way and how the LORD had saved them.

9 Jethro was delighted to hear about all the good things the LORD had
done for Israel in rescuing them from the hand of the Egyptians. 10 He said,
“Praise be to the LORD, who rescued you from the hand of the Egyptians
and of Pharaoh, and who rescued the people from the hand of the
Egyptians. 11 Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for
he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.” 12 Then Jethro,
Moses’ father-in- law, brought a burnt offering and other 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.

13 The next day Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the people, and
they stood around him from morning till evening. 14 When his father-in-law
saw all that Moses was doing for the people, he said, “What is this you are
doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people
stand around you from morning till evening?”

15 Moses answered him, “Because the people come to me to seek God’s
will. 16 Whenever they have a dispute, it is brought to me, and I decide
between the parties and inform them of God’s decrees and laws.”

17 Moses’ father-in-law replied, “What you are doing is not good. 18 You
and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work
is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone. 19 Listen now to me and I
will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the
people’s representative before God and bring their disputes to him.

20 Teach them the decrees and laws, and show them the way to live and
the duties they are to perform. 21 But select capable men from all the people
— men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain — and
appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 22 Have
them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every
difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will
make your load lighter, because they will share it with you. 23 If you do this
and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain, and all these
people will go home satisfied.”

24 Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said. 25 He
chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people,
officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. 26 They served as judges
for the people at all times. The difficult cases they brought to Moses, but
the simple ones they decided themselves.

[27]Then Moses sent his father-in-law on his way, and Jethro returned to his own country.

COMMENTARY

1 – 5 Lightfoot and several other commentators wanted to place Jethro's visit to Moses between vv.10 and 11 in Numbers 10 for three reasons: (1) the law on burnt offerings and sacrifices had not been given as yet (cf. v.12); (2) the statutes and laws mentioned in vv.13 and 16 had not yet been revealed; and (3) the judges and rulers appointed in vv.21 – 26 do not appear to have been appointed until the Hebrews leave Sinai (according to Dt 1:9 – 15). As they see it, the present arrangement and relationship of the materials in Exodus 18 is topically, not chronologically, motivated.

While we have no special objections to this argument in principle, we cannot agree with the three reasons cited here. In fact, we have already seen that portions of the law are already known before they are formalized at Sinai (see Notes on 16:4; notice the loose wording of Dt 1:9 – 15, along with the presence of sacrifices almost from the beginning of the human race in Ge 4:3 – 4; 8:20 – 21). The chapter, then, is in its proper chronological order.

Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, meets Moses and the Hebrews in the desert at the "mountain of God" (v.5; identified as Horeb or Sinai in 3:1; see comment there). Moses must have sent his wife and children on ahead to Midian to bring Jethro back to Sinai for a visit (v.2). Most commentators feel that Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer were sent back to Midian after the family dispute in 4:20 – 26, but there is no solid evidence for this view.

6 – 8 Jethro announces his arrival by means of a messenger (v.6 begins lit., "and he said"), and Moses goes out to meet him (cf. Ge 18:2; 19:1; 32:6; 33:1) and to exchange the usual oriental greetings (v.7). Moses then recounts "all" (*kol*; see comment on 9:24 – 25 for the hyperbolic usage of *kol*) that Yahweh (notice the clear reference to the personal and covenantal name of God in deference to the generic name Elohim, which depicts God's relationship to all creation) has done. As the psalmist exhorts (Ps 145:5 – 7, 12), so Moses acts, recounting the awesome work and abundant goodness of Yahweh both in the

Hebrews' rescue from Egypt and in their subsequent "hardships" (v.8) along the way: the Red Sea, thirst, lack of meat, and the war with Amalek.

9 – 12 The news evokes an instinctive "Praise be to the LORD" from Jethro (v.10), thereby showing either that he has continued believing in the God of his fathers (since he, too, is a descendant of Abraham through Midian [Ge 25:2]) or that he has spiritually benefited from Moses' forty-year stay in his house. Jethro continues, "Now I know that the LORD [Yahweh] is greater than all other gods" (v.11). This confession formula — "Now I know" — is used by two other Gentile believers: the widow at Zarephath (1Ki 17:24), and Naaman, commander of the Syrian army (2Ki 5:15). It is a clear statement to Yahweh's incomparable greatness above all the gods of Egypt (not necessarily Jethro's past or present penchant for polytheism).

Too frequently in the past, textbooks on the religion of Israel have read too much (polytheism) or too little (genuine piety) into such statements as this one and make them normative for all true Israelite religion (e.g., Jdg 11:24; 2Ki 5:17 – 18). However, if v.11b, with its unspecified subject of the verb ("treat arrogantly"), is a reference to all the gods of Egypt that were smitten in the plagues and not an alleged statement of past competition between Yahweh and polytheistic forms of worship, then Jethro is a true believer and no polytheist. Cassuto, 216, translates the second half of v.11, "Excelling them [the gods] in the very things to which they laid claims" (see Notes).

Jethro then brings (*lqḥ*) a burnt offering (*ʿōlâ*) and fellowship offerings (*zebaḥîm*; NIV, "other sac-rifices") to "Elohim" (v.12). *Lqh* is the customary word for proffering or providing an animal for sacrifice; it is never used in the OT in the sense of "to offer" (see Notes for further discussion; cf. also 25:2; Lev 12:8). Accordingly, those scholars are wrong who wish to see the Midianite priest officiating here, he is not the one "offering" these sacrifices, but he does worship and fellowship with Moses and Aaron "in the presence of God."

We expected Yahweh's name in this last phrase, but the generic name for God (Elohim) is used perhaps because God is relating to the Gentile and the Jewish world simultaneously.Yet Cassuto, 217, makes a strong point: Never is any other name for God used in the Torah with any of the sacrifices except Yahweh's name; this is the one exception. Clearly Jethro is an outsider, an alien *gēr*; cf. the

name Moses gave to his son — *Ger*shom), even though he has made a strong declaration of faith in vv.10 – 11. It should be remembered also that "in the presence of God" may simply reflect the phrase, "the glory of God," and thus we may have a covenantal meal eaten in the presence of the God who dwells in the midst of his people.

13 – 16 Jethro is depicted as an efficiency expert, who wisely suggests a modification in Israel's leadership structure (cf. vv.17 – 23), which Moses then adopts with divine permission. Prior to this the people came only to Moses for instruction (v.15) and judicial settlements (v.16).

17 – 23 Jethro's solution to this lengthy process, which is wearing out both people and leader (v.18), is to give Moses that portion of the work that involves a twofold office: (1) an advocate on behalf of the people (v.19), and (2) an interpreter on behalf of God to teach the people (v.20). Jethro warns that his plan can be exectuted only if God is pleased with this advice (vv. 19, 23).

Moses' work is to be supplemented with additional help. He is to "select capable men" (v.21). While it may seem from this passage that Moses autocratically chooses his own staff, the actual election is the work of all the people (see Dt. 1:9, 13). The instruction of these assistants is in Israel's "decrees and laws . . . the way to live and the duties they are to perform" (v. 21).

As to qualifications, these men should be "capable men" (i.e., men with a native aptitude for judging), (2) "men who fear [in reverence and belief] God," (3) "men of truth" (i.e., trustworthy"), and (4) men who hate all "dishonest gain." All those chosen are to be arranged in a graduated series of multiples of ten, with Moses being the court of final appeal (vv.22, 26).

Amazingly enough, Moses listens to his father-in-law. Bush, 1:230, remarks, "The great Jehovah did not disdain to permit his prophet to be taught by the wisdom and intelligence of a good man, though he was not of the commonwealth of Israel. It is not a little remarkbable that the very first rudiments of the Jewish polity were thus suggested by a stranger and a Midianite."

NOTES

1 Jethro is called כֹּהֵן מִדְיָן (*kōhēn midyān,* "the priest of Midian"; see also 2:16). In this regard he was much like "Melchizedek king of Salem" and "priest of God Most High" (Ge 14:18).

4 אֱלִיעֶזֶר (*ʾĕlîʿezer,* "Eliezer") means "my God is a helper." The "sword of Pharaoh" that Moses was delivered from may refer to the past incident when he slew an Egyptian and fled Egypt (2:11 – 15). Bush, 1:225, prefers to translate וַיַּצִּלֵנִי (*wayyaṣṣîlēnî,* "he saved me") as a future: "he *will* save me." However, this is an unlikely suggestion for a *waw* conversive with the imperfect, which is always translated as a past narrative tense.

11 On כִּי בַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר זָדוּ עֲלֵיהֶם (*kî baddābār ʾăšer zādû ʿălêhem,* lit., "because of the matter when they were arrogant to them"; NIV, "for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly"), Cassuto, 216, suggests that the word "gods," which appears in v.11a, is the subject of the verb *zādû;* hence, "the gods acted proudly or boasted." The full sense of the verse would be thus: "Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, precisely [*kî*; this is its meaning in 32:29] with respect to those things that [*baddābār ʾăšer*] the gods [of Egypt] claimed they excelled."

12 Instead of, "Then [Jethro] . . . brought" for וַיִּקַּח (*wayyiqqaḥ*), the RSV follows the Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate in reading "offered." The point is that Jethro himself does not offer the burnt offering. It is most unusual to see an עֹלָה (*ʿōlâ,* "burnt offering"; later revealed in Lev 1) coming from this Gentile unless Jethro, too, is a believer who is willing to dedicate himself totally to Yahweh, as this offering symbolizes.

15 לִדְרֹשׁ אֱלֹהִים (*lidrōš ʾĕlōhîm,* "to seek God's will") is literally "to inquire of God." This phrase usually means to secure an answer from God to a specific question (Hyatt, 193, calls attention to Ge 25:22 – 23; 1Sa 9:9; 1Ki 22:8; 2Ki 3:11; 8:8; 22:13, 18). Also notice Moses' practice of entering the tabernacle, where the Lord speaks to him (33:7 – 11).

21 תֶּחֱזֶה (*teḥĕzeh,* "select") is literally, "you will see." Cassuto, 220, shows how "seeing" is used for "choosing" in both Hebrew and Ugaritic (e.g., in Ge 41:33:

"And now let Pharaoh look for [or 'choose'] a discerning and wise man").

אַנְשֵׁי־חָיִל (*anšê-ḥāyil*, "capable men, men of worth") possess qualities of character, leadership, and success (cf. the "wife of noble character" in Pr 31:10 – 31). Some of the same qualities are expected of leaders in the church (Ac 6:3; 1Ti 3:2 – 12;Tit 1:7 – 9).

II. DIVINE MORALITY (19:1 – 24:18)

OVERVIEW

Israel's deliverance from Egypt partially fulfills the Abrahamic covenant (Ge 15:13 – 16; Ex 2:24 – 25; 6:4 – 8). But this environment of God's gracious act of deliverance also lays the basis for the revelation of his law, as it reflects God's character and/or word. This law serves as a continuation of God's promise to the patriarchs and is decisively important in the history of Israel and of humanity as a whole. Thus the Mosaic covenant with its law is not all that distant and unrelated to the Abrahamic covenant. Given the gracious promises of the Abrahamic covenant and the deliverance from Egypt under Moses, the grace of the Abrahamic promise fits the laws of Moses in the same way that Romans is related to James. In one year's time, some fifty-nine chapters of Scripture (Ex 19 – 40; Lev 1 – 27; Nu 1 – 10) are given at Sinai.

Moses returns to Sinai, where he met God in Exodus 3. Here the people will remain for just ten days short of a full year. They arrive at Mount Horeb/Sinai three months to the day after they have left Egypt (Ex 19:1). They leave this area "on the twentieth day of the second month of the second year" (Nu 10:11).

A. The Eagles' Wings Speech (19:1 – 8)

[1]In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt — on the very day — they came to the Desert of Sinai. [2]After they set out from Rephidim, they

entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

[3]Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: [4]‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. [5]Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, [6]you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.”

[7]So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak. [8]The people all responded together, “We will do everything the LORD has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 In the third month, later known as Sivan (our late May or early June), Israel leaves Rephidim (see 17:1, 8) and comes to the Desert of Sinai (v.1). Thus the last two weeks of what later generations name the month of Nisan and the four weeks of I[y]yar have passed, for it is now the seventh week. “The desert in front of the mountain” (v.2) is called er-Raha (meaning “the palm [of a hand]”) in that it is a flat plain about five thousand feet above sea level that stretches over four hundred acres, almost like an amphitheater, with additional areas in adjoining valleys.

Several mountains have been associated with Sinai: Gebel Musa, Ras es-Safsafeh, Gebel Serbal, and a mountain near Al-Hrob. The Al-Hrob location makes it impossible to make sense of the route of the exodus, since it is a volcanic mountain to the east of the Gulf of Aqabah. Gebel Serbal does not have a wilderness at its base; therefore, the choice is between Gebel Musa (7,363 feet elevation at the southern end of er-Raha) and Ras es-Safsafeh (6,540 feet high at the northern edge of the plain). Most scholars prefer to identify Sinai with Gebel Musa because of its relation to the plain (20:18: “they stayed at a distance”) and because of its imposing granite formations.

3 – 6 The “sign” given to Moses in 3:12 is fulfilled here (v.3): he has returned to the “mountain of God” (3:1). When Moses “goes up” (see Notes) the mountain, Yahweh delivers his “eagles’ wings speech.” A twofold title is used for God’s people (v.3): “house of Jacob” (a reminder of their humble beginnings; cf. Ge 28:13; 35:11; 49:7) and “the people of Israel” (a statement as to what they have become: a nation).

While it is difficult to determine for certain, it seems that Moses makes three trips up the mountain of God in this chapter (19:3 – 7, 8 – 14, and 20 – 25).

The metaphor of the eagles’ wings could refer to one of the eight species of eagles (*nĕšārim*)found in Syria, Palestine, and Arabia. But most likely it is the Palestinian vulture. This metaphor is developed most extensively in Deuteronomy 32:9 – 11, where the loving compassion, protection, strength, and watchfulness of God are compared to the majestic bird’s attributes. As the young eagles are carried on the adult wings and brought out of their nests and taught to fly, soYahweh has lovingly carried and safely delivered Israel. Moses writes in Deuteronomy:

> For the LORD’s portion is his people,
> Jacob his allotted inheritance.
> In a desert land he found him,
> in a barren and howling waste.
> He shielded him and cared for him;
> he guarded him as the apple of his eye,
> *like an eagle* that stirs up its nest
> and hovers over its young,
> that spreads its wings to catch them
> and carries them on its pinions. [emphasis mine]

This same imagery of God as swooping down like an eagle is used in Isaiah 40:30 – 31, where “even youths . . . and young men .. . will soar on wings like eagles.”

This covenant (first given to the patriarchs), however, while unconditional in its transmission and bestowal, was indeed conditioned with regard to its enjoyment and personal participation (see Kaiser, 93 – 94, 111, 130, 156 – 57). The presence of the “if ” (,*im*) in v.5 does not pave the way for Israel’s

declension from grace into law anymore than an alleged presence of a condition paved an identical fall for the patriarchs (Ge 22:16 – 18; 26:5) or for David (2Sa 7:14 – 15; 1Ki 2:4; 8:25; 9:4 – 5; Pss 89:30 – 37; 132:11 – 12).

The six verses (vv.3 – 8) of this eagles' wings speech and its response are cast in the familiar Near Eastern suzerain treaty form. Mendenhall ("Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 [1954]:

50 – 76) has demonstrated that the Hittites in the middle second millennium used a literary pattern to write their treaties imposed by strong kings on their vassals that is similar to the literary pattern found in these six verses and in Exodus 20. This pattern is as follows (see Richard J. Sklba, "The Redeemer of Israel," *CBQ* 34 [1972]: 3 – 4):

Preamble: v.3b, a summons by God
Historical prologue: v.4
Stipulations: v.5a
Blessings: vv.5b – 6a
Acceptance in a solemn assembly: vv.7 – 8

Three titles summarize the divine blessings that an obedient and covenant-keeping Israel will experience: they will be a "treasured possession" (v.5), "a kingdom of priests," and "a holy nation" (v.6; see Notes). "Treasured possession" signifies that Israel will be God's valuable property and distinct treasure (Dt 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Ps 135:4; Mal 3:17; cf. Tit 2:14; 1Pe 2:9) set aside for a marked purpose (see Notes). Unlike real estate, this type of property is moveable, and like everything on earth, it too is owned by God (Ex 19:5). Israel is royal property, God's special possession marked out for special purposes!

As a whole, the people of Israel are being called to be a national priesthood, "royal priests," but unfortunately the people decline the privilege. The title "kingdom of priests" occurs nowhere else in the OT, but the call for all to minister in a priestly way is unmistakable. Interpreters have debated why a priesthood should be talked about so early when God has not yet designated one in Israel, but that misses the point that all are at first called for this task. Therefore the original purpose of God is delayed (not scrapped or forever dismissed) until in NT times the priesthood of all believers is once again proclaimed (1Pe 2:9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; see Kaiser, 103 – 13).

This is why they are to be at once priest-kings and royal-priests (Isa 61:6; cf. 1Pe 2:5, 9; Rev 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) — *everyone* in the whole nation. This expression is not a parallel phrase or a synonym for a "holy nation"; it is a separate entity. The whole nation is to act as a mediator of God's grace to the nations of the earth, even as Abraham was promised that through him and his seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Ge 12:3).

"Holy nation" designates Israel as a separate and distinct nation because her God is holy, separate, and distinct, as are God's purposes and plans (Dt 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; Isa 62:12; cf. 1Pe 2:9).

This whole synopsis of God's suzerain treaty with his vassal Israel is remarkably personal. It begins in v.3 addressed "to the sons of Israel" (*libᶜnêyiśrāʾēl*) and concludes with an inclusion in v.6 "to the sons of Israel"(*ʾel-bᶜnê yiśrāʾēl*). . Its first and last clauses are introduced by an emphatic plural "you" (,*attem*, vv.4, 6) along with two other references to a plural "you" in v.4 (,*etkem*).

7 – 8 The people respond, "We will do everything the LORD has said" (v.8). Some commentators have criticized Israel for speaking rashly by agreeing to do all that God says, for they go off promise, so it is alleged, and onto a law standard. On the contrary, the Lord approves of their response in glowing terms: "Everything they said was good. Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commandments always" (Dt 5:28 – 29).

NOTES

1 Grammatically the expression בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה(*bayyôm hazzeh*, "on the very day") can be taken indefinitely: "at this time." It need not be the very first day of the third month. Later Jewish tradition assigned the time of the giving of the law to Pentecost, i.e., the fiftieth day since Passover and the night of the exodus. This connection between the Feast of Weeks and the giving of the law may go back as far as the time of King Asa in 2 Chronicles 15:10 – 15.

3 One of the alleged marks that this passage is a mixture of sources is the fact

that Moses עָלָה (*ʿālâ*, "went up") the mountain seven times (19:3, 20; 24:9, 13, 15, 18; 34:4; also, he "went back to the LORD" in 32:31); yet he only "went/came down" four times (19:14, 25; 32:15; 34:29). Indeed, Moses does make several trips up the mountain, perhaps as many as three or four. The major difficulty is in Exodus 24 (see comment there); but there is no reason why multiple sources or authorship should be set forth as the best solution.

5 On עֲלָה (*ʿālâ*, "treasured possession"; GK 6035), see Moshe Greenberg, "Hebrew *sgûllāh* and Akkadian *sikiltu*," *JAOS* 71 (1951): 172ff. The basic root of this term is *sakaìlu* ("to set aside a thing or a property"). While real property (e.g., real estate) cannot be removed, this property can. This term is used for extremely valuable property; God values his people Israel. **6** There are four defensible Hebrew renderings of מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים (*mamleket kōhᵃnîm*, "kingdom of priests"): (1) *mamleket* as an absolute in apposition to *kōhᵃnîm*, viz., "kings, i.e., priests"; (2) *mamleket* as a construct with the *nomen regens* expressing an attribute of the *nomen rectum*, "royal priesthood"; (3) *mamleket* as a construct with opposite term being the *nomen regens*, "priestly kingdom" (as in Pr 21:20 [*kesîl ,aìdaìm*, "a fool of a man," i.e., "a foolish man"] or Psalm 2:6 [*har-qādᵉšî*, "hill of my holiness," i.e., "my holy hill"]); or (4) an unexpressed "and" must be read here: "kings (and) priests."

The emphasis here is not on the individual but on the whole nation (19:3, 6), and the expression is more a compound noun than it is a construct. (See R. B. Y. Scott, "A Kingdom of Priests [Exodus xix.6]," *OtSt* 8 [1950]: 213 – 19;William L. Moran, "A Kingdom of Priests," in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought* [ed. John L. McKenzie; New York: Herder and Herder, 1962], 7 – 20; Kaiser, *Theology*, 107 – 10). The Israelites are to be kings and priests to God on behalf of the nations; they are to be mediators of the gospel as missionaries to the nations ("all people on earth will be blessed through you," Ge 12:3b); and they are to be partakers in the present aspects and coming reality of the "kingdom of God."

B. The Advent of God on Sinai (19:9 – 25)

[9]The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their

trust in you.” Then Moses told the LORD what the people had said.

[10]And the LORD said to Moses,“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes [11]and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. [12]Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, ‘Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. [13]He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.’ Only when the ram’s horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain.”

[14]After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. [15]Then he said to the people,“Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations.”

[16]On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. [17]Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. [18]Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, [19]and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

[20]The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up [21]and the LORD said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. [22]Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.”

[23]Moses said to the LORD,“The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’ ”

[24]The LORD replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.”

[25]So Moses went down to the people and told them.

COMMENTARY

9 To forestall all future pretext for saying that the law Moses is about to give to Israel is of his own devising, God confers on Moses the highest possible honor and deference ever given to a mortal human. The “you” in this verse is singular, but the event of the advent or coming of God in a dense, dark cloud is public. Ordinarily, God dwells with his people in a pillar of cloud and fire; but here it turns dense and pitch black, perhaps with a roar of thunder and the flash of lightning as God’s voice pierces creation. The voice of God speaking to Moses (cf. Dt 4:32 – 33) is also audible in the camp so that Israel and all her true descendants will trust in Moses’ words both then and for all time. God speaks to Moses in the hearing of the people so that they will know that the word Moses teaches is from God and not Moses himself.

10 – 15 As a token of their inward preparation for meeting with God on the third day, the people must wash their clothes, stay off the mountain, and abstain from sexual relations with their mates. The theology of this passage, then, is fitness for meeting with God and preparation for the worship of God (see comment on 3:5). What is required to approach the God of gods, King of kings, and Lord of lords is both decorum and a holistic sanctification of our *bodies* as well as our inner persons. This is not to say that there is intrinsic virtue in the mere act of washing clothes or abstaining from marital relations, but the outward act signals that the inner work of sanctification has also been sought. The people are to act by washing their clothes, but God will act by consecrating them through the work of his servant Moses.

Sealing off the mountain (v.12) is as much a temporary and arbitrary boundary as it was in 3:5, but it is introduced as an aid for the proper worship of a holy God. Likewise Paul allows Chris tian couples a temporary abstinence from sexual relations so that they may devote themselves to prayer (1Co 7:5; also cf. 1Sa 21:4 – 5). The penalty for intruding on such a holy scene is death, since anyone who dares to transgress so explicit a divine precept is already a profane and sacrilegious person whose presence pollutes the rest of the worshiping community. This is tantamount to what Numbers 15:30 – 31 calls “sinning defiantly” or what the NT regards as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:26 – 31).

After the “ram’s horn” (see Notes) sounds a long, drawn-out blast, the people

can once again ascend the mountain (v.13b). Moses does not rescind this privilege and charge them anew to prevent their ascending the mountain in vv.21 – 25; but, as Calvin suggests, all the verbs should be translated as pluperfects.

16 – 19 The advent of God takes place amid a most impressive display of cosmic disruptions: thunder and lightning (v.16; cf. Ps 77:18; Heb 12:18 – 19; Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19), an exceedingly loud trumpet blast (cf. Rev 1:10; 4:1), and a thick cloud (Ex 19:9; 2Ch 5:14).A deep moral impression is made on the people, for they are in the presence of the glorious majesty of the holy God, who is about to reveal his person and character in his law. This magnificent event will be unexcelled until the Lord Jesus returns again in blazing fire (2 Thess 1:7 – 12).

20 – 25 If the verbs are translated as pluperfects, then v.20 is parenthetical, since we have been told that the Lord has already descended in v.18; but we have not as yet been informed that Moses has been called to the top of the mount. Moses' reaction to this awesome sight is not given here, but in Hebrews 12:21 his response is, "I am trembling with fear." God's response comes in v.21. Moses must warn the people not to intrude rashly on the presence of God. The triple emphasis (vv.12 – 13, 21 – 22, 25) is a standard literary practice when the text wants us to notice an important subject. Thus the boundary between the human and the divine is not to be taken lightly by mortals.

"Even" (*wegam*) the priests who approach the Lord are to consecrate themselves (v.22). Certainly this is not the Aaronic priesthood, which has not yet been established. It must be a reference either to the "firstborn" of every family who were dedicated and consecrated to God (13:2), or better still to the whole community now designated as "a kingdom of priests." Only later will the tribe of Levi be substituted for each firstborn male (Nu 3:45). In the meantime the "young Israelite men . . . offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings" (24:5). Should they fail to observe this request, the Lord will "break out against them" (19:22). The verb to "break out" (*yiprōṣ*) is the same one that is preserved in the name given in 2 Sam uel 5:20 (Baal Perazim) and 2 Samuel 6:8 (Perez Uzzah).

The sanctity of the mountain of God is also to be seen in its tripartite division, as commentators usually note (Enns, 391). At the top of the mountain, where Moses is summoned, God himself is immediately present, just as he is in the

Most Holy Place in the soon-to-be-built tabernacle. Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the elders have access to the mountain, but not to its summit, corresponding to the Holy Place in the tabernacle. The rest of the people stay at the foot of the mountain, corresponding to the outer court of the tabernacle and later the temple. It presumably anticipates the same divisions that are to be given to Moses in the design and building of the tabernacle that follows.

NOTES

13 הַיּוֹבֵל (*hayyôbēl*, "ram's horn") is literally "trumpet." From *yôbēl* comes the Latin *jubilum* and the English "jubilee." The ancient name שֹׁפָר (*šōpār*,"trumpet") is used in 19:16, 19; 20:18. In this case the sustained blast accompanies the presence of Yahweh; elsewhere it signals the alarm for war or the summons for assembly or worship (Lev 25:9; 2Ch 15:14; Pss 47:5; 81:3; Isa 27:13).

17 לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים (*liqraʾt hāʾlōhîm*) is rendered "to meet with God." Although the verb *qaìra*, is usually used for people meeting each other (4:14, 27; 18:7), it becomes another word in Israel's worship vocabulary.

20 וַיֵּרֶד (*wayyēred*, is the same anthropomorphism used of God elsewhere (e.g., Ge 11:5; 18:21).

22, 24 Besides calling the whole nation of Israel a "kingdom of priests" (or better, "kings and priests" Ex 19:6; Isa 61:6), Melchizedek a priest-king (Ge 14:18; Ps 110:4) and Jethro a priest of Midian (Ex 2:16;

3:1; 18:1), these two verses in Exodus 19 stand alone except for the same title הַכֹּהֲנִים (*hakkōhᵃnîm*,"priests") — being given to David's sons (2Sa 8:18), his grandson (1Ki 4:5), and Ira the Jairite (2Sa 20:26).

See the discussion by Carl Armerding, "Were David's Sons Really Priests?" in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation* (ed. Gerald Hawthorne; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 75 – 86.

25 Some translate the verb in וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם (*wayyōʾmer* "told them") as though it were

wayyedabbeìr (“and he spoke”), i.e., as though ch. 20 were the object of the verb. However, the object must be supplied from what is contained in the *previous* verses.

C. The Decalogue (20:1 – 17)

OVERVIEW

The term “Decalogue” can be traced to Exodus 34:28 (“he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant — the Ten Commandments”) and Deuteronomy 4:13 (“he declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments”). These “ten words” are distinguished from the rest of the law of God in that they are audibly delivered to Moses by God himself and later written by God on two tables of stone. These laws, however, are not numbered; accordingly, Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions make one commandment out of what the Greek Orthodox and Reformed call the first two. Therefore, to keep the total number to ten, Roman Catholics and Lutherans divide the tenth into two commandments, making the first sentence of the tenth commandment the ninth and the rest the tenth.

But this measure presents problems when 20:17 is compared with the repetition of the Ten Commandments in Deuteronomy 5:6 – 21. In Exodus 20:17, the coveting of a “house” occurs *before* the coveting of a wife, whereas the order is reversed in Deuteronomy 5:21. Thus the content of the ninth commandment is confused. There is also a collocation of the sixth and seventh commandments, for the LXX, Philo, and some manuscripts of Mark 10:19 and Luke 18:20 place the prohibition on adultery (seventh commandment) *before* that of killing (sixth commandment). Nevertheless, the LXX of Deuteronomy 5:17 – 18 and Matthew 19:18 preserve the usual Hebrew order of the text.

The purpose of the law of God is to show: (1) humanity’s awful sinfulness in moral distance from God, (2) humanity’s need for a mediator if people are ever to approach God (which mediatorial work Israel promptly assigns to Moses, but which becomes the occasion for God to give the promise about “that prophet”

who is to come in Dt 18:15 – 19), and (3) humanity how to live more abundantly by using the unchangeable perfections of the nature of God as revealed in the moral law as a guide. However, the warning must be sounded again and again, as the NT puts it: “By observing the [works of] the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16).

The substantival form of the law can be assessed in these five points:

1. Although it has a loving spirit for its opening, and this spirit is not absent in the body of the law, it is mainly stringent and imperatival in *form*. One course of action ought to, or must, be taken, because that course best reflects the character and nature of God.
2. It makes no difference whether the law is stated negatively or positively, for the moral law is always double-sided. It commands and prohibits, for every moral act at the same time requires refraining from a contrary mode of action, and every forbidden evil has its opposite good being encouraged.
3. If the mere omission of doing a thing forbidden is all that is commanded, there would be nothing moral in the matter — the command would be fulfilled just by inactivity, which in the moral sphere is but another name for death.
4. When a command is stated, everything contrary is virtually forbidden. For example, Calvin said that “You shall not kill” is not fulfilled merely by abstaining from all injury or wish to inflict injury; it means in addition that we are to aid our neighbor’s life by all that is in our power. God forbids us to injure and hurt our brother, for he would have us hold his life to be dear and valuable to us. So when he forbids, he also at the same time demands all avenues of love that can contribute to the life of our neighbor.
5. It is easier to state in few words what a believer cannot do. One’s freedom to obey God opens up more possibilities than the reverse; hence, the law can be stated negatively more succinctly. The negative form also strives to meet the strong current of evil in the human heart.

[1]And God spoke all these words:

[2]“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[3]“You shall have no other gods before me.

[4]“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in

heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. [5]You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, [6]but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[7]"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

[8]"Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. [9]Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [10]but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. [11]For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

[12]"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

[13]"You shall not murder.

[14]"You shall not commit adultery.

[15]"You shall not steal.

[16]"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

[17]"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 God's commandments are simply labeled "all these words" (v.1). The title "Ten Commandments" (*ʿᵃśeret haddᵉbārîm*) comes from Exodus 34:28 and Deuteronomy 4:13, while Hebrews 12:19 speaks of "a voice speaking words." God himself is the speaker and source of these commandments (cf. the emphasis in Dt 5:12 – 13, 32 – 33).

The grammatical form of these commandments needs some comment. There are only three positive statements in vv.2 – 17 — all without a finite verb: v.2, "I [am] the LORD your God"; v.8, "Remember [*zākôr*] the Sabbath day"; and v.12, "Honor"[*kabbēd*, a Piel infinitive absolute by analogy with v.8, though in form it

could also be a Piel infinitive construct or a second masculine singular Piel imperative] your father and your mother." John J. Owens ("Law and Love in Deuteronomy," *Rev Exp* 61 [1964]: 274 – 83) suggests that these three phrases might divide vv.2 – 17 into three sections and govern the other seven commands. (Notice that Dt 5:6 – 21 connects commandments six to ten by conjunctions, suggesting that they are governed by the fifth commandment.) These phrases might be rendered thus:

(1) "I, *being* the LORD your God . . . "

[Therefore observe commandments one to three] (2) "*Remembering* the Sabbath day . . . "

[Therefore do vv.9 – 11] (3) "*Honoring* your father and your mother . . . "

[Therefore observe commandments six to ten] The resulting outline would be as follows: (1) Right Relations with God (vv.2 – 7), (2) Right Relations in the Worship of God (vv.8 – 11), and (3) Right Relations with Society (vv.12 – 17).

Therefore, to begin, the Lawgiver places the law in the environment of grace, for it is the gracious act of redemption and deliverance from Egypt that reveals the Lawgiver's name, Yahweh. The "I"(*ʾānōkî*) is both emphatic and the subject;Yahweh is the predicate (so also the LXX and Vulgate). Part of this phrase occurred in 15:26 and is repeated here in vv.5, 7, 10, 12, and in 23:19. It appears over two hundred times in Deuteronomy but never again in Exodus or Numbers.

Indeed, the introduction of Yahweh's name at this point brackets both ends of the exodus event: In Exodus 3:14 and 6:2, God tied the promise of his deliverance of Israel from Egypt with his name,Yahweh. Once that promise became reality, he proclaims his name once again. All that Yahweh is, says, and does is embodied in this one affirmation: "I am Yahweh."

The rest of the statement becomes one of the great formulas of Scripture, used 125 times to describe the character and graciousness of Yahweh:"who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

Most scholars point to the similarity between this historical prologue (followed by its stipulations, witnesses, and provisions for succession) and the great suzerain-vassal treaty forms of the ancient Near East (see comment on 19:3 – 6). It is especially noteworthy that the second-millennium Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties exhibit the same five parts as the Mosaic Decalogue and the whole book of Deuteronomy, which conservatives also date in the second millennium.

There is the problem of determining just when it was that God spoke "all these words." In Exodus 19:25, Moses descends from the mountain to speak to the people. Does Moses then go back up the mount to receive these ten words? It would appear that Exodus 20:18 picks up the action of 19:16.

If so, then Moses receives the Decalogue prior to his descent; therefore, the Ten Commandments are, as it were, set off from the narrative, thereby giving them more emphasis and significance.

Another solution, suggested by Enns (412), is to say that since 19:25 has Moses coming down from the mount and 20:21 has him going back up the mount, the commandments in 20:2 – 17 are spoken by God to Moses and all the people at the base of the mountain. This would meet the requirements of 20:19, where the people say to Moses, "Speak to us yourself." It may be that we were not supposed to unravel the sequencing of Moses' ups and downs on the mountain, but the more important matter is the content of what he receives from God!

3 In the first commandment there is only one difficult expression. It is the phrase *ʿal-pānāya* ("before/besides me"). Nowhere does this Hebrew phrase mean "except me." Such phrases do exist in Isaiah's vocabulary: "There is no God apart from me [*mibbalʿādāy*]. . . there is none" (*ʾên ʿôd*, Isa 45:6). and "none besides me" (*ʾên ʿôd*, Isa 45:6). But none of these is chosen here. The Hebrew preposition *ʿal* has such a wide use that no one translation can be affirmed to the exclusion of the others. Once in a while the words carry a hostile undertone (e.g., of Ishmael: "he will live *over against* [NIV, 'in hostility toward'] all his kinsmen," Ge 16:12 [my tr.]; cf. also Ge 25:18; Ex 20:20; Dt 21:16). Thus W. F. Albright (*From Stone Age to Christianity* [2d ed.; New York: Doubleday, 1957], 297, n. 29) translates it, "Thou shalt not prefer other gods to me." The result, however, is the same: "I

will not give my glory to another" (Isa 42:8). Houtman, 3:31, renders the *al* as "above" (Ge 48:22; Dt 21:16; Ps 16:2) or even "in addition to" (Ge 28:9; 31:50; Lev 18:8; Dt 19:9).

4 – 6 The second commandment discusses the *mode* rather than the *object* of worship (which the first dealt with). It has two parts: the precept (vv.4 – 5a) and the penalty (vv.5b – 6).

The OT is replete with synonyms and words (there are fourteen) for idols and images. Verse 23 explains the proscribed idols as "gods of silver or gods of gold." It also includes images carved from stone or wood and later those made from metal. Since *pesel* ("idol," v.4) refers to statues, the word *temûnâ* ("resemblance, form") applies to real or imagined pictorial representations (see Notes). None of these is to be made *with the intention to worship them*. This commandment is not meant to stifle artistic talent but only to avoid *improper* substitutes that, like the idols of Canaan, will steal hearts away from the true worship of God. One need only to consider the tabernacle with its ornate appointments — all fashioned according divine instruction — to see that making representations is not absolutely forbidden.

"You shall not bow down to them or worship them" (v.5) is a figure of speech called hendiadys, where two expressions are used to convey a single idea, viz., "to offer religious worship." This expression is only used with respect to giving worship to foreign deities forbidden to Israel (see Stamm and Andrew, 86).

The sanctions attached to this command begin with the majestic reminder that "I, the LORD [Yah-weh] your God, am a jealous God." A "jealous" or "zealous" God must not be understood in such popular misconceptions as that God is naturally suspicious, distrustful, or wrongly envious of the success of others. When used of God it denotes: (1) that attribute that demands exclusive devotion (Ex 34:14; Dt 4:24; 5:9; 6:15), (2) that attitude of anger directed against all who oppose him (Nu 25:11; Dt 29:20; Ps 79:5; Eze 5:13; 16:38, 42; 25:11; Zep 1:18), and (3) that energy he expends on vindicating his people (2Ki 19:31; Isa 9:7; 37:32; Joel 2:18; Zec 1:14; 8:2). Thus all idolatry, which Scripture labels elsewhere as spiritual adultery, that raises up competitors or brooks any kind of rivalry to the honor, glory, and esteem due to the Lord will excite his zealousness for the consistency of his own character and being. Every form of substitution,

neglect, or contempt, both public and private, for the worship of God is rejected here.

Children who repeat the sins of their fathers evidence it by personally hating God; hence they too are punished like their fathers. Moses makes it plain in Deuteronomy 24:16: “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.” The effects of disobedience last for some time, but the effects of loving God are far more extensive — “to a thousand [generations]” (v.6). Ezekiel 18:4 likewise says, “The soul that sins is the one who will die.” Thus, both statements are true. Just as one traitor can endanger a whole army, so one unrigh teous parent can leave a pile of troubles for the next generations to work through. That is the effect of corporate solidarity of the family and the whole human race. Yet the individual principle is also true — each ship rests on its own bottom, so to speak.

7 The third commandment deals, not with internal worship (first commandment) or external worship (second word), but with the profession of the mouth in true adoration of God. God’s “name” (Heb. *šēm*) must be treated with the highest regard and reverence. “The name” of God stands for so much more than the mere pronouncing of his title of address. It includes: (1) his nature, being, and very person (Ps 20:1; Lk 24:47; Jn 1:12; cf. Rev 3:4), (2) his teaching or doctrine (Ps 22:22; Jn 17:6, 26), and (3) his moral and ethical teaching (Mic 4:5; see *ZPEB*, 4:360 – 66).

To “take up” (*nissaʾ*) the name of the Lord on one’s lips “in vain” (*laššāwʾ*) means to “misuse” it, i.e., to use it for no purpose (note Jeremiah’s adverbial use of this phrase where it precedes the verb: Jer 2:30; 4:30; 6:29; 18:15; 46:11 — a usage pointed out by Childs, 411).

In Exodus 23:1 *šāwʾ*, means “false,” and it is related to the word for “deception,” *šeqer*. Therefore, some false or vain uses of God’s name on the lips of his people include: (1) to express mild surprise in a minced oath, (2) to fill in the gaps in speeches or prayers by using the name of the Lord without any real function in the sentence, and (3) to confirm by an oath something that is false. If God’s name is used lightly, how shall the righteous survive in times of distress (Pr 18:10)? Notice that this commandment does not exclude legitimate oaths, for they appear frequently (e.g., Dt 6:13; Ps 63:11; Isa 45:23; Jer 4:2; 12:16; Ro 1:9;

9:1; 1Co 15:31; Php 1:8; Rev 10:5 – 6).

It is not correct to say that the Jewish community forbade the use of Yahweh's name at all times in its history. The policy was established ostensibly to safeguard against the inadvertent use of God's name, a danger that put the user at possible risk of offending God by a false or purposeless use of that great name. But the Jewish community also reacted to what the heretics were doing, for the Jewish people did pronounce this name of God when the practice of their detractors was not to pronounce it. In this way one could determine who was and who was not a member of whose community.

8 – 11 The fourth commandment invokes the remembrance of the Sabbath. The term "Sabbath" is derived from the Hebrew verb *šbt* ("to rest or cease from work"). While many have tried to derive the Sabbath from the Babylonian *šapattu/šabattu(m)* (where the first, seventh, fifteenth, and twenty-eighth days were regarded as days of special sacrifice, linked to *ume lemnuti*, taboo days), it has not resulted in any certainty. The Hebrews are to set aside each seventh day as belonging to the Lord their God, which was not the scheme set out in Babylonia.

The command to remember the Sabbath is *moral* insofar as it requires of a person a due portion of his or her time dedicated to the worship and service of God, but it is *ceremonial* in that it prescribes the seventh day. The Chris tian church is required to observe the morality of *time* by setting aside one day in seven to the Lord, but it has chosen to change the *ceremonialization* of that day from the seventh to the first (cf. the early church's use of "the Lord's Day," i.e., a day belonging to the Lord [Rev 1:10] or "on the first day of every week" [1Co 16:2]). The sanctity of the first day in honor of God's new deliverance, which the Lord Jesus accomplished in his death and finally in his resurrection, is already signaled in the symbolism of the feasts in Leviticus 23 — "the day after the Sabbath" (v.15); "on the first day hold a sacred assembly" (v.7);"the first day is a sacred assembly . . . on the eighth" (vv.35 – 36). Indeed, these are the very feasts that point forward to events that Chris tians now celebrate on Sunday!

The reason for memorializing this day rests on two works of God: one retrospective (v.11 links it with the creation), which points to the new rest of God in the end times; the other prospective in the plan of redemptive history (Dt 5:15 links it with the exodus from Egypt), which points to a new exodus in the final

day. This interpretation is borne out by the fact that the Sabbath is another "sign" of the covenant (see comment on 31:12 – 17). As Childs, 417, points out, in neither case did Israel's memory of either the creation or the exodus act as the motivation for observing the Sabbath. Rather, it was the reverse: Israel observed the Sabbath to remember God's work of creation and the exodus.

12 The fifth commandment, to "honor" one's parents, involves: (1) prizing them highly (cf. Pr 4:8; i.e., wisdom, when sought above everything else and prized more highly than all else, will bring honor to its seekers); (2) caring and showing affection for them (Ps 91:15; i.e., God's honoring of individuals is shown by his care for them in being with them and delivering them from trouble); and (3) showing respect and fear, or revering them (Lev 19:3). When Ephesians 6:1 says, "Obey your parents," it immediately and necessarily qualifies it with, "in the Lord." Parents are to be shown honor (v.2), but nowhere is their word to rival or be a substitute for God's Word. Proverbs likewise urges deep regard for one's parents (see Pr 10:1; 15:20; 17:6, 21, 25; 19:26; 20:20; 23:22; 28:24; 30:11, 17). There are also examples of special care for parents and other members of the family in the OT (Ge 45:10 – 11; 47:12; 50:21; Jos 2:13, 18; 6:23; 1Sa 22:3; Houtman, 3:52).

The promise in Ephesians 6:2 – 3 attached to this commandment to revere one's parents is unique, even though there is a sense in which the promise of life stands over all the commandments (Dt 4:1; 8:1; 16:20; 30:15 – 16). The promise of a long life in the land refers primarily to the land of Canaan and the people of Israel. The national character of this language can be confirmed by referring to Deuteronomy 4:26, 33, 40; 32:46 – 47. The captivity of Israel is caused, in part, by a failure to honor their parents (Eze 22:7, 15). This commandment possesses what we might call a ceremonial or a national promise, but it does have present-day individual application in the same way that all the commandments are meant to give a new quality of life (without creating a merit system to gain eternal life).

13 The sixth commandment forbids murder. The ethical theology that lies behind this prohibition is the fact that all men and women have been created in the image of God (Ge 1:26 – 27; 9:6). While Hebrew possesses seven words for killing, the word used here — *rāṣaḥ*. GK 8357) — appears only forty-seven times in the OT. If any of these seven words could signify "murder," where the factors of premeditation and intentionality are present, this is the verb.

Recently, however, some have complained (see Childs, 420, for the bibliography and argument) that many of the instances of this verb relate to blood vengeance and the role of the avenger (gō'ēl) in Nu 35; Dt 4:41 – 43; 19:1 – 13; Jos 20:3). Without exception, however, in the later periods (e.g., Ps 94:6; Pr 22:13; Isa 1:21; Hos 4:2; 6:9; Jer 7:9) it carries the idea of murder with intentional violence. Every one of these instances stresses the act or allegation of premeditation and deliberateness — and that is at the heart of this verb. Thus this prohibition does not apply to beasts (Ge 9:3), to defending one's home from nighttime burglars (Ex 22:2), to accidental killings (Dt 19:5), to the execution of murderers by the state (Ge 9:6), or to involvement with one's nation in certain types of war, as illustrated by Israel's history. It does apply, however, to self-murder (i.e., suicide), to all accessories to murder (2Sa 12:9), and to those who have authority but fail to use it to punish known murderers (1Ki 21:19).

As Houtman, 3:60, concludes,"In the Decalogue it is especially premeditated manslaughter that is in view. A prohibition of unpremeditated homicide obviously would not fit an apodictic statement. . . . The thrust of the commandment is against deliberate, violent and unlawful killing."

14 The seventh commandment forbids adultery. The verb "to commit adultery" (*nā'ap*) can be used of either men or women. Since the punishment for adultery is death (Dt 22:22), while the penalty for the seduction of a virgin is an offer of marriage or money (Ex 22:16 – 17; Dt 22:23 – 29), adultery is distinguished from fornication in the OT.

The sin of adultery is not just a question of violating another person's property; it is also a moral question (see Ge 20:9, Abimelech's narrow escape from "such great guilt" [lit., "sin"], and as noted also in Ge 39:9, adultery is a "sin against God" as well as against Potiphar). Procksch observes (cited in Stamm and Andrew, 100) that a "man can commit adultery against a marriage other than his own, the woman only against her own." One of the best allegories on marital fidelity is found in Proverbs 5:15 – 21. In the history of interpretation this commandment, though not in itself broadened, includes all sorts of sexual aberrations and forms of unchastity (Lev 18; 19:20; 20:10 – 11; 21:9; Dt 22:13 – 14 as well as 1Co 7:1 – 24; 1Th 4:1 – 8).

15 The eighth commandment prohibits stealing (*gānab*) either a person or an

object. This commandment recognizes that the Lord owns everything in heaven and earth (see Pss 24:1; 115:16), and only the Lord can give or take away. Therefore no human being may despotically enslave or kidnap a fellow human or usurp the rights to property he has not owned or been given.

16 The ninth commandment calls for sanctity of truth in all areas of life, even though the vocabulary primarily reflects the legal process in Israel (ʿēd šāqer here, or ʿēd šāwʾ in Dt 5:20, and ʿānâ, "to answer" or "give" in response to legal questions posed at a trial). To despise the truth is to despise God, whose very being and character are truth. Certainly the reference to "lying" (kaḥēš) in Hosea 4:2 demonstrates that this commandment has a broad application.

Included in this command is a call to abstain from all lying, deceit, slander, gossip, backbiting, vilification, rash depictions of one's neighbors, and the like. Instead one must love the truth, be honest, and do all that is possible to protect the good name of one's neighbor.

17 The tenth commandment disallows covetousness. The general idea of the root ḥāmad(GK 2773) is "to desire earnestly, long after, covet." In the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 5:21, it is paralleled by tiʾawweh("to set one's desire" on something).

This commandment deals with a person's inner heart and shows that none of the previous nine commandments can be observed merely from an external or formal act. Every inner instinct that leads to the act itself is also included. The point is, as Paul later tells Timothy,"Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1Ti 6:6). Jesus also comments, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Mt 15:19). See also Romans 7:7 – 8 for the importance of the tenth commandment in Paul's grappling with identifying sin by means of the law.

NOTES

4 The LXX translates תְּמוּנָה (tᵉmûnâ,form"; GK 9454) seven times by homoiōma ("likeness"), twice by *doxa* ("glory"), and only once by *morphe*ì ("form"). The

point is that it does not refer to its shape but only to an imagined resemblance. The word is theologically sensitive when used in Numbers 12:8: "the *form* of the LORD."בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ (*bammayim mittaḥat lāʾāreṣ*, "waters below") is literally,"in the waters under the earth."

Some have pressed this expression and others in a wooden manner to derive an alleged three-tiered or triple-decked universe: (1) heavens above, (2) earth beneath, (3) waters under the earth. But the whole picture is of Western fabrication. Simply put, this is the Hebrew idiom for the shoreline. Deuteronomy 4:18 places the fish in these "waters under the earth." If they are believed to be in the netherworld, then the fishermen will need very good sinkers to retrieve these fish!

5 What is the antecedent for the plural suffixes in v.5? It cannot refer to *pesel* ("idol") or *temûnâ* ("form"), since they are both singular, unless both words may be taken *ad sensum* as plural idols. Zimmerli (quoted by Childs, 405) says that these plural suffixes must refer to "other gods" in v.3. If this is so, then some linking of these commandments, such as we have argued for in the introduction to this section, is necessary.

6 Actually חֶסֶד*esed*; GK 2876), which is rendered "love" here, is one of the best words in the OT for the grace of God. It appears some 248 times. A good discussion of *hes.ed* is by Katharine D. Sakenfield, *The Meaning of H.esed in the Hebrew Bible* (HSM 17; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1978).

D. The Reaction of the People to the Theophany (20:18 – 21)

18When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance 19and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

20Moses said to the people,"Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

21The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

COMMENTARY

18 The awe-inspiring phenomena that heralds the theophany (= appearance of God) terrifies the people. What was depicted in 19:16 – 19 is here restated anew from the perspective of the people's reactions (see Notes on the Hebrew order of the subject and predicate) to this same phenomena. Deuteronomy 5:23 explains why the "mountain [is] in smoke"; it is "ablaze with fire." Enns, 425, notes that the word for "lightning" (*lappîdōt*, plural) occurs only one other time in the Pentateuch (Ge 15:17), where it refers to the "torch" that passed between the split-in-half animal carcasses that formed a path through which God passed as a "smoking firepot with a blazing torch" in that unilateral covenant making scene (note too Jdg 4:4, where the husband of the prophetess Deborah is named Lappidoth).

19 The Israelites suddenly have no desire to approach God's holy presence (cf. Heb 12:19). They instinctively sense their need for a mediating priesthood or some representative who will dare to approach God on their behalf. Out of this realized need, one of the greatest revelations in the long line of OT promises of the Messiah comes. He will be a "prophet" like Moses, who will speak God's word to them (notice the identical setting for Dt 18:15 – 22; cf. also 5:24 – 25). As a result of this arrangement the people stay "at a distance," and Moses delivers God's word to them.

20 – 21 "Do not be afraid," Moses tells the people (v.20; cf. 14:13), for God has not come to kill Israel (cf. Dt 5:24 – 25) but to test (*nāsâ*) her. God is testing the people not in order to discover something, for he already knows everything. It is rather to prove through the people's experience the very things that God himself already knows.

V.20 contrasts two types of "fear": tormenting fear (which comes from conscious guilt or unwarranted alarm and leads to bondage) and salutary fear (which promotes and demonstrates the presence of an attitude of complete trust and belief in God; cf. the "fear of the LORD God" beginning in Ge 22:12). This second type of fear will keep us from sinning and is at the heart of the OT's wisdom books (cf. Pr 1:7; Ecc 12:13). Here is a holy fear, a holy awe for Yahweh and for all that he has said.

Israel's newly appointed mediator "draws near" or "approaches" the thick

darkness where God is and receives the directives contained in the Book of the Covenant (v.21; cf. 24:7). Moses apparently goes up the mountain again to receive another body of legal material.

NOTES

18 Normally in Hebrew the predicate appears first in the sentence, but the subject — e.g., וְכָל־הָעָם (*wᵉkol-hāʿām*; lit., ‘ “and all the people”) — precedes the verb to express antithesis to the subject of the preceding clause (cf. 9:20 – 21; 19:3, 18; 20:21) or in consecutive narrative to show that an action so described takes place simultaneously with, not subsequently to, the events described above (Cassuto, 252).

רֹאִים (*rōʾîm*; GK 8011) means to see with all the senses, as does our word “perceiving.” It is also an example of the figure of speech called *zeugma*, for the verb “heard” (v.18) must be inserted by the translators since the one verb “saw” yokes together two objects — one that exactly suits it and the other that does not. The root נוּעַ (*nûaʿ*) of וַיָּעֲנוּ (*wayyāʿănûʿû*, they trembled with fear”) conveys the ideas of being physically swayed and experiencing great mental agitation and emotional trembling.

E. The Book of the Covenant (20:22 – 23:33)

OVERVIEW

The title for this section,"The Book of the Covenant," as we noted above, derives from 24:7. The laws may be arranged into two basic types, following Albrecht Alt's analysis (*Essays on Old Testament History and Religion* [Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966], 81 – 132). The conditional form, where the main condition is introduced by "if " or "when"(*kî*)and additional subheadings are introduced by "if " (,*im*), is called the casuistic or case law (i. e., laws based on actual precedents, usually beginning with "if a person . . ." or "when a person . . .") formulations. The second type takes a categorical, unconditional form and is in the second person (most frequently the singular), often with a negative command or prohibition. This is the form used for most of the Ten Commandments and called the apodictic (i.e., expressing what is always true) formulation.

Some scholars isolate a third group of laws from within the category Alt labeled apodictic. These laws are located in 21:12, 15 – 17; 22:19 – 20. They usually are brief (around five short words), carry the death penalty, and all begin with a Hebrew participle. They are called the "Hebrew participial laws," but actually they are unconditional and apodictic in function. We may speak, then, of three basic types of law in the covenantal code.

Houtman, 3:81, sees two divisions of the covenantal code material: Exodus 21:1 – 22:16 (except 21:12 – 17) has exclusively casuistically formed regulations, while 22:17 – 23:12 contain a large number of apodictic formulations of laws. Moreover, at the beginning (20:22 – 26) and at the end (23:13 – 19) there is an inclusio of ordinances for the service and worship of Yahweh. Thus the triad we are using as the outline for the book of Exodus appears here in this section again: redemption, law, and worship.

Every indication, from similar law codes discovered in the ancient Near East, is that the Book of the Covenant is very early. Thus there is no reason for

doubting their Mosaic environment and claim. Yet they also markedly differ from these other collections of laws in that they include apodictic laws combined with motive clauses.

S. M. Paul ("Studies in the Book of the Covenant in Light of Cuneiform and Biblical Law," VTSup 18 [1970]: 101 – 2), dates these laws to the time just before the settlement of the tribes in Canaan and refuses, to the consternation of scholars who value the results of modern literary criticism, to accept that the casuistic laws were taken over directly from the Canaanites. We agree with him on both accounts. A thorough discussion of the relevance of these laws is James B. Jordan's *The Law of the Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21 – 23* (Tyler, Tex.: Institute for Chris tian Economics, 1984).

Regarding this covenantal code it is helpful at times to compare what was being legislated in other collections of juridical texts from the ancient Near East. These include: Codex Ur Nammu (end of the third millennium BC, in Sumerian); Codex Lipit-Ishtar (beginning of the second millennium BC, in Sumerian); Codex Eshnunna (beginning of the second millennium BC, in Akkadian); Codex Hammurapi (eighteenth century BC, in Akka-dian); Middle Assyrian Laws (twelfth to eleventh century BC, in Akkadian); and Neo-Babylonian Laws in Akkadian and Hittite Laws in Hittite (1600 – 1200 BC).

1. The Prologue (20:22 – 26)

> [22]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: [23]Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.
>
> [24]" 'Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. [25]If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. [26]And do not go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.'

COMMENTARY

22 – 23 A fuller account of these verses appears in Deuteronomy 4:14 – 16. These verses repeat the same subject that appeared in the Decalogue (20:3 – 6), but it also adds that the sanctuary belongs exclusively to Yahweh and describes how the altar is to be built and used. The connection, then, is this: since all of you witnessed the Lord's speaking from heaven even though you saw no visible shape, form, or representation (v.22), totally abandon any thought of ever trying to embody me in a material image (v.23). First and foremost, then, the worship of God must be without idols.

24 – 26 This passage has played a major role in critical scholarship. The claim has been that the Deuteronomic legislation requiring one central sanctuary (e.g., Dt 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21) is a clear advance over this Sinaitic legislation that allows sacrifices at numerous places sanctified by the divine presence. This view cannot be endorsed for many reasons. To state just one, Deuteronomy 27:1 – 8 enjoins Israel to build an altar on Mount Ebal (not in Jerusalem!), in the very words of Exodus 20:24, which Deuteronomy was supposed to have revoked (see Kaiser, 131 – 33).

These modest earthen altars were temporary in form and after a while occasional in usage (see the patriarchs' altars in Ge 12:7; 13:18; 22:9). Stone altars were not to be hewn with a "tool" (*h.ereb*, usually translated elsewhere as "sword"), possibly so that no one could turn it into an image or some other fetish. Likewise, steps were not to be built up to the altars. The reason is that the long garment would trail behind the worshiper on the steps as he descended and thus possibly expose his nakedness. Later on, when altars with steps were allowed to be built (Lev 9:22; Eze 43:13 – 17), the priests were instructed to wear linen undergarments (Ex 28:40 – 42; Eze 44:18).

NOTES

23 Since the sequence תַּעֲשׂוּן אִתִּי (*taʿăśûn ʾittî*, "make . . . to be alongside me") usually demands an object, the NIV has supplied "any gods." Most translations disregard the MT's accentuation and place "gods of silver" with the first half of the sentence. Neither solution is totally satisfactory. The NIV faces the problem that

the verb <*asfÊ*aa means “to make” and not “to place.”

24 אַזְכִּיר אֶת־שְׁמִי (*ʾazkîr ʾet-šmî*, I cause my name to be honored”), the Hiphil of *zkr* may reflect a denominative usage: “to proclaim [the name]” (Childs, 447). On the “name,” see comment on 3:13.

2. Laws on Slaves (21:1 – 11)

[1]“These are the laws you are to set before them:

[2]“If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. [3]If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. [4]If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.

[5]“But if the servant declares, ‘I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free,’ [6]then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.

[7]“If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. [8]If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed.

He has no right to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. [9]If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. [10]If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. [11]If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.

COMMENTARY

1 It is strange that a title (for v.1 appears to be such) comes after the section on the altar law (20:22 – 26). Even so it is not certain that this title was intended to describe the rest of the covenantal code, up to 23:19. Since 22:18 – 23:19 consists mainly of moral and sapiential exhortations along with the ritual

calendar in an appendix-like fashion, it is best to regard the title as referring to 21:2 – 22:17.

These “laws” (or better, “judgments”; *mišpāṭîm*) are given as precedents to guide Israel’s civil magistrates in cases of civil dispute, rather than as authorizations for individuals to take matters into their own hands. While these “judgments” deal mainly with temporal matters, they nevertheless are based on one or another express commandment in the Decalogue. It is most appropriate, therefore, that these judicial and political regulations, given by God to Moses when “Moses approached the thick darkness where God was” (20:21), should be set alongside the Decalogue. The two belong together in time as well as in interpretation.

2 – 4 Laws on the Hebrew slave are mentioned only in 21:1 – 11; Leviticus 25:39 – 43; Deuteronomy 15:12 – 18; and Jeremiah 34:8 – 22. But there are differences in these laws. In Deuteronomy 15:12 the Hebrew slave, male or female, is sold, while in Leviticus 25:39 he sells himself, and the servitude is determined by the Year of Jubilee. In Exodus 21:2 and Deuteronomy 15:12, the servitude is for six years (Code of Hammurabi 117 limits bondage to three years). In Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17 it is for life when the slave desires it.

Whether “Hebrew” (*ʿibrî*, v.2) is equivalent to the ethnic name or has the more general sociological meaning of “outlaw” or member of a particular class of the population (*ḥabiru*) is still a matter of scholarly debate (see Notes). Certainly in 2:11 (and in some thirty other occurrences in the Pentateuch) the word *ʿibrî* is regarded as an ethnic name (“he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew [*ʿibrî*], one of his own people”), even though there may be a certain scornful connotation about it (cf. later usage:

1Sa 14:11; 29:3; Jnh 1:9). The word “buy” (*tiqneh*) in judicial terms means to acquire as one’s own property (see Paul, 46, n. 7).

After six years of service, the slave is to go out “free” (*ḥāpšî*). As early as 1926, J. Pedersen (“Note on Hebrew *ḥupsu* ?” *JPOS* 6 [1926]: 103 – 5) saw a connection between the Hebrew (*ḥāpšî*) and the social class *h.upsu* found in Rib-Addi correspondence from Byblos (see I. Mendelsohn, “New Light on the *Ḫupšu*,” *BASOR* 139 [1955]: 9 – 11). The term seems to mean a “freeman” in the sense

that he was a citizen again after the emancipation.

The terms for coming (*bō'*) and going (*yāsā'*; v.3), or entering and leaving slave status, are similar to those used in the Akkadian Nuzi texts. A slave left his master either single or married, depending on what he was when he entered. Where a wife had been given to a slave, that wife and any children that resulted from that union belonged to the master. An exact parallel to v.4 exists at Nuzi (Paul, 48, n. 5).

5 – 6 "I love my master . . . my wife and children" (v.5) has legal rather than romantic overtones (cf. the juridical aspect of its antonym in Dt 21:15 – 17: "does not love," i.e., "hates"). The "judges" (see Notes on v.6) changed the slave's status from temporary to permanent by a ceremony at the doorpost of the master's house. The perforation of the ear (v.6) is used as humiliating punishment in the Middle Assyrian Laws (A 40:84 – 86, 101 – 3; 44:45). Some also believe that Psalm 40:6 alludes to this law.

7 – 11 This pericope pertains to a girl who is sold by her father not for slavery but for marriage. Nonetheless, she is designated a "servant" (*'āmâ*, v.7). Should the terms of marriage not be fulfilled, it is to be considered a breach of contract, and the purchaser must allow the girl to be redeemed; she must not be sold outside of that family (v.8). Always she must be treated as a daughter or a freeborn woman, or the forfeiture clause will be invoked. On the issue of slavery and the Christian, see Kaiser, *Old Testament Ethics*, 288 – 90; Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath,War and Women* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald, 1983), 31 – 64.

NOTES

2 On the question of עִבְרִי (*'ibrî*, "Hebrew") or, according to some, *ḥāpiru*, see Greenberg, *The H.ab/piru*; M. P. Gray, "The *Ḥabîru*-Hebrew Problem," *HUCA* 29 (1958): 135 – 202. It is difficult, on the basis of our present knowledge, to determine whether *'ibrî* is (1) a Gentilic (Greenberg), (2) a fellow Israelite (Hyatt, 228), or (3) an appellative denoting a member of a class (mercenaries) of the population (Cassuto, 265 – 66; Gray, "*ḥāpiru*-Hebrew Problem," 173 – 74).

Besides the articles by Pedersen and Mendelsohn cited in the commentary, see N. P. Lemche, “The Hebrew Slave,” *VT* 25 (1975): 139 – 42. He translates לַחָפְשִׁי (*laḥāpšî*, “free”) as “a dependent on a city-state or on a citizen of the same” (144). In n. 63 he conjectures that *ḥpšu* may be a West Semitic word for the Akkadian *muškēnum*, who also were a client class.

3 – 4 The etymology of בְּגַפּוֹ (*bᵉgappô*, “alone”) is unclear, but in context it is taken to mean “single, by himself.”

6 On הָאֱלֹהִים (*hāʾᵉlōhîm*, “the judges”), see Cyrus H. Gordon, אלהים in Its Reputed Meaning of Rulers, Judges,” *JBL* 54 (1935): 134 – 44; A. E. Draffkorn, “Ilani/Elohim,” *JBL* 76 (1957): 216 – 24. The background for the Hebrew use of this word to mean “judges” reflects the quasi-juridical function of the *ilāni* (“house gods”) at Nuzi. A person would have been required in societies such as at Nuzi to swear before the household gods, the idols who were protectors of the family estate. The expression thus became a stereotype or stock formulation to signify the court of justice or those before whom witnesses appeared in that court. See the objections to this view in J. R.Vannoy, “The Use of the Word *hāʾᵉlōhîm* in Exodus 21:6 and 22:7, 8,” in *The Law and the Prophets* (ed. by J. H. Skilton; Nutley, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1974), 225 – 41. F. Charles Fensham (“New Light on Exodus 21:7 and 22:7 from the Laws of Eshnunna,” *JBL* 78 [1959]: 160 – 61) and Vannoy unconvincingly argued that *ha*ì,*elohîm* referred to Yahweh, God of Israel, and a ceremony performed at the door of the sanctuary.

9 כְּמִשְׁפַּט הַבָּנוֹת (*kᵉmišpaṭ habbānôt*, “the rights of a daughter”) is literally, “according to the manner of daughters.” Paul (55, n. 3) finds a similar provision in a Nuzi law on slavery:“She shall treat her as a daughter of Arraphar” (*ša ki mānat Arrábhi ipušaššî*), “she shall not return her to [the status of] a slave girl”; and in an Assyrian document Paul found: “(the adopting father) must treat her as his own daughter, an Assyrian” (*ša ki mānat Arrábhi ipušaššî*).

10 The meaning of this third element owed the first wife — עֹנָתָהּ (*ʿōnātāh*, “her marital rights”) — is uncertain. Paul (56 – 61) suggests that the *hapax legomenon* should be translated “oil” or “ointments,” since many Sumerian and Akkadian texts list the three items of “food, clothing, and oil” as the basic necessities of life. (See also S. M. Paul, “Exodus 21:10: A Threefold Maintenance Clause,” *JNES* 28 [1969]: 48 – 53.) Cassuto, 269, disputes the later

traditional rendering of “times of cohabitation” (see the Gk. *teìn homilian auteìs*, “her cohabitation”) and conjectures instead “the conditions of her abode.” Note, however, the apostle Paul’s use in 1 Corinthians 7:3 of *opheileìn* (“marital duty,” i.e., the obligation or one’s due of conjugal duties).

3. Laws on Homicide (21:12 – 17)

12“Anyone who strikes a man and kills him shall surely be put to death.
13However, if he does not do it intentionally, but God lets it happen, he is to flee to a place I will designate.
14But if a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from my altar and put him to death.
15“Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death.
16“Anyone who kidnaps another and either sells him or still has him when he is caught must be put to death.
17“Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.

COMMENTARY

12 – 14 This is a list of offenses that demand the death penalty: murder, striking one’s parents, kidnapping, or cursing one’s parents. Homicide contravenes the divine order established in Genesis 9:6. Since men and women are made in the image of God, no money or property settlement can atone for the sinful and premeditated destruction of people and the image of God in them. Accidental death is distinguished from intentional murder in vv.13 – 14, which is an act of God (see Notes). Additional expressions of unintentionality are found in Numbers 35:22 – 23 — “unintentionally” (*bᵉlō᾽ ṣᵉdiyyâ*, lit., “without design”); “without seeing” (*belō᾽ rᵉʾôt*, “inadvertently”); “[since he was] not his enemy” (*lō᾽-ʾôyēb*) — and in Deuteronomy 19:4 – 5 — “unintentionally” (*biblî-daʿat*, “without knowledge”).

In the case of accidental death, a place of asylum is to be provided (later there were cities of refuge: Nu 35:6 – 34; Dt 19:1 – 13). But no sanctuary — not even at the altar itself (cf. 1Ki 1:51; 2:28) — is to be given to the deliberate murderer. Notice the unusual first-person references to God: “I will designate” (v.13) and

“my altar” (v.14). According to Paul, 64, these are the only examples of direct address in the biblical corpus of law except for 21:1 – 2.

15 – 17 Parental authority is so highly valued in biblical law that striking and cursing parents is a criminal and capital offense. Verses 15 and 17 are illustrations of the fifth commandment. Notice that the father and mother are mentioned together, thereby stressing their basic equality.

Kidnapping (v.16) is not a property offense since no property offense draws a capital punishment, and this law is not listed under property laws. Instead, it is the theft of a human being (cf. Code of Hammurabi 14).

NOTE

13 וְהָאֱלֹהִים אִנָּה לְיָדוֹ (*wᵉhāʾᵉlōhîm ʾinnâ lᵉyādô*, but God lets it happen”) is an event beyond human control (“an act of God”). Similar expressions of acts of providence occur in Code of Hammurabi 249:38 – 39; 266:77.

4. Laws on Bodily Injuries (21:18 – 32)

18 “If men quarrel and one hits the other with a stone or with his fist and
he does not die but is confined to bed, 19 the one who struck the blow will
not be held responsible if the other gets up and walks around outside with
his staff; however, he must pay the injured man for the loss of his time and
see that he is completely healed.
20 “If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies
as a direct result, he must be punished, 21 but he is not to be punished if the
slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property.
22 “If men who are fighting hit a pregnant woman and she gives birth
prematurely but there is no serious injury, the offender must be fi ned
whatever the woman’s husband demands and the court allows. 23 But if
there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, 24 eye for eye, tooth for
tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, 25 burn for burn, wound for wound,
bruise for bruise.

[26]"If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. [27]And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth.

[28]"If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. [29]If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. [30]However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded. [31]This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. [32]If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.

COMMENTARY

18 – 19 Following five cases that could involve the death penalty, we have five cases involving assault and bodily injury.

In the first example, a dispute between two men results in one being injured to the extent that he is bedridden and then recovers sufficiently to be able to walk outdoors with the help of a cane or crutches. This injury will not carry the talionic punishment (cf. vv.23 – 25), but the assailant must indemnify the injured for his "loss of time" (*lib^enê* lit., "his sitting" or "his cessation"), loss of income, and all medical expenses. Code of Hammurabi 206 requires the same action: he must pay the cost of the physician if he swears, "I did not strike him deliberately," i.e., with premeditated malice. Hittite Laws (10) also prescribe that the assailant is to care for the injured man until he recovers and then pay him six (later edition, "ten") shekels of silver as well as pay the physician's fee.

20 – 21 The second case involves a master striking his slave, male or female. Since the slave does not die immediately as a result of this act of using the rod (not a lethal weapon, however) but tarries for "a day or two" (v.21), the master is given the benefit of the doubt; he is judged to have struck the slave with disciplinary and not homicidal intentions. This law is unprecedented in the

ancient world, for a master could treat his slave as he pleased.

When this law is considered alongside the law in vv.26 – 27, which acts to control brutality against slaves at the point where it hurts the master, viz., his pocketbook (see Notes), a whole new statement of the value and worth of the personhood of the slave is introduced. Thus if the master strikes a slave severely enough only to injure one of his members, he loses his total investment immediately in that the slave wins total freedom; or if he strikes severely enough to kill the slave immediately, he is to be tried for capital punishment (vv.18 – 19). The aim of this law is not to place the slave at the master's mercy but to restrict the master's power over him (cf. similar laws in Code of Hammurabi 196 – 97, 200).

22 – 25 The third situation describes men who are fighting, and one of them somehow unintentionally strikes a pregnant woman (perhaps a concerned wife who tries to intervene on her husband's behalf) so that her labor is immediately induced. This law envisions two alternatives: (1) "she gives birth prematurely [lit., "her children came out"; notice the use of the plural to reflect how many and either sex] but there is no serious injury," and (2) "if there is serious injury."

This law may not be classified with the numerous cases of miscarriage in such law codes as Sumerian Laws 1 – 2; Lipit Ishtar Laws iii, 2' – 13'; Code of Hammurabi 209 – 14; Middle Assyrian Laws A 21, 50 – 52; and Hittite Law Code 17 – 18. Rather, it is written principally as an assault case where no real damage (see Notes) comes to either the mother's or the baby's life. If this were not so, this case would have appeared in the homicide laws (vv.12 – 17).

For the accidental assault, the offender must still pay some compensation, even though both mother and child survive (as in vv.18 – 19).The fee is be set by the woman's husband and approved by a decision of the court. Should the pregnant woman or her child die, the principle of *lex talionis* is invoked, demanding "life for life" (v.23). But why should this principle be invoked if it were an accidental fatality when v.13 exempts such a person from the death penalty? The answer is found in two facts: (1) the *lex talionis* principle (vv.23 – 25) is a stereotyped formula stating simply that the punishment must match, but not exceed, the damage done; and (2) Numbers 35:31 permits a substitute to ransom all capital offenses in the OT except in the one case of willful and premeditated

murder.

Thus we conclude that the defendant must surrender to the deceased child's father or wife's husband the monetary value of each life (note v.30) if either or both are harmed. The *lex talionis* of vv.23b – 25 does impose a strict limit on the amount of damages anyone can collect. In modern terms it would read: car bumper for car bumper and car fender for car fender. No one is to try to "get rich quick" off such situations. Notice also that this is to be a rule of thumb for the judges, not an authorization of personal vendetta or private retaliation (cf. Lev 24:19 – 20; Dt 19:21).

26 – 27 Any slave who suffers a permanent injury from his owner wins his freedom immediately (cf. vv.20 – 21, however, for authorized discipline by the master). Thus a slave is not to be treated with caprice, as though he were mere chattel. The economic sanctions against the owner are designed so that the owner is given plenty of reason to resist any abusive tactics for the sake of his financial investment, even if he totally disregards the slave's dignity and worth as a human being.

28 – 32 A fifth example of bodily injury involves goring oxen. Human beings are responsible for the injuries their oxen cause to other people. These laws are closely paralleled by the Code of Ham-murabi 250 – 52 and the Eshnunna Law Code 54 – 55. The biblical version of these laws, which obviously springs from the same culture, times, and background, is very different from Hammurabi's or Eshnunna's versions in that the Bible's concern is not economic but moral and religious. The ox (v.28) — and the ox and his owner (vv.29 – 30) —are guilty of taking another person's life. Notice that Genesis 9:5 – 6 requires that the life of a beast that kills a human being as well as that of a murderer be taken, because human beings are made in the image of God. It makes no difference regarding the age, social status, or gender of the person (vv.31 – 32); boys and girls, men and women, male and female slaves are all created in the image of God.

NOTES

21 כִּי כַסְפּוֹ הוּא (*kî kaspô hûʾ*, "since [the slave] is his property") is literally, "because he is his money." The point is not that human beings are mere chattel (which the

NIV tends to suggest) but that the owner has an investment in this slave that he stands to lose either by death (not to mention capital punishment) or by emancipation (vv.27 – 28).

22 – 23 אָסוֹן (*ʾāsôn*, "serious injury") also means "mischief " or "harm" (cf. Ge 42:4, 38; 44:29). Paul (72, n. 3) quotes the statement on Genesis 42:38 in the *Mechilta*: "ˆwsa here means only death."

22 Paul, 72, translates וּבִפְלִלִים (*biplilîm*, "the court [allows]") as "the payment to be based on reckoning," with the reckoning to be the estimated age of the embryo. The root *pll* means "to estimate, assess, calculate," according to Ephraim Speiser ("The Stem PLL in Hebrew," *JBL* 82 [1963]: 301 – 6, esp. 303).The LXX must have taken a similar tack when it distinguished in these verses between a fetus not fully formed (*exeikonisme-non*) and one that is. Cazelles (cited in Speiser) refers *biplilîm* to a third party who arbitrates a settlement. We believe this is closer to the idea of "assessment" or even "court" or "judge" (cf. Dt 32:31; Job 31:11).

30 For his criminal neglect, a man can , פִּדְיֹן נַפְשׁוֹ (*pidyôn napšô*,' "redeem his life") if the slain one's family allows him to substitute כֹּפֶר (*kōper*,"a [substitute] payment"). That sum is not to indemnify the victim's family but to ransom the man's life (cf. Nu 35:31).

5. Laws on Property Damages (21:33 – 22:15)

> 33"If a man uncovers a pit or digs one and fails to cover it and an ox or a donkey falls into it, 34the owner of the pit must pay for the loss; he must pay its owner, and the dead animal will be his.
>
> 35"If a man's bull injures the bull of another and it dies, they are to sell the live one and divide both the money and the dead animal equally. 36However, if it was known that the bull had the habit of goring, yet the owner did not keep it penned up, the owner must pay, animal for animal, and the dead animal will be his.
>
> 22:1"If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.

2“If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the
defender is not guilty of bloodshed; 3but if it happens after sunrise, he is
guilty of bloodshed.
“A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be
sold to pay for his theft.
4“If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession — whether ox or
donkey or sheep — he must pay back double.
5“If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard and lets them stray
and they graze in another man’s fi eld, he must make restitution from the
best of his own fi eld or vineyard.
6“If a fire breaks out and spreads into thornbushes so that it burns shocks
of grain or standing grain or the whole fi eld, the one who started the fi re
must make restitution.
7“If a man gives his neighbor silver or goods for safekeeping and they are
stolen from the neighbor’s house, the thief, if he is caught, must pay back
double. 8But if the thief is not found, the owner of the house must appear
before the judges to determine whether he has laid his hands on the other
man’s property. 9In all cases of illegal possession of an ox, a donkey, a
sheep, a garment, or any other lost property about which somebody says,
‘This is mine,’ both parties are to bring their cases before the judges. The
one whom the judges declare guilty must pay back double to his neighbor.
10“If a man gives a donkey, an ox, a sheep or any other animal to his
neighbor for safekeeping and it dies or is injured or is taken away while no
one is looking, 11the issue between them will be settled by the taking of an
oath before the LORD that the neighbor did not lay hands on the other
person’s property. The owner is to accept this, and no restitution is required.
12But if the animal was stolen from the neighbor, he must make restitution
to the owner. 13If it was torn to pieces by a wild animal, he shall bring in the
remains as evidence and he will not be required to pay for the torn animal.
14“If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and it is injured or dies
while the owner is not present, he must make restitution. 15But if the owner
is with the animal, the borrower will not have to pay. If the animal was
hired, the money paid for the hire covers the loss.

COMMENTARY

33 – 34 Culpable negligence (such as leaving a pit uncovered) that results in loss or damage to the property of another demands full restitution to the person who suffers the loss. The dead animal becomes the property of the person who is negligent and who must replace that animal.

35 – 36 A second property damage case concerns a cattle fight, where one animal kills a neighbor's animal. In this case they are to kill the surviving animal, sell its meat, and divide the payment as well as the dead animal. But if the animal that survives has had a reputation for goring, then its owner must take total responsibility for the animal.

This law parallels Eshnunna Law 53 exactly: "If an ox gores to death another ox, both owners shall divide the price of the live ox and the flesh of the dead ox."

22:1 – 4 This third example of property damage, which also illustrates the morality of the eighth commandment, contains a group of five cases, as do many of the other paragraphs in the Book of the Covenant. The subject is introduced by *kî* ("if ") and continues with four special instances prefaced by the word *,im* ("if "). In cases of theft the penalty is much greater than those of negligence involving another person's property. The man is directly guilty and stands to benefit from his theft (Paul, 85).

The reason for the fivefold penalty in the case of stealing an ox is probably because one person has stolen the means of another's livelihood. The principle extends to taking any plowing or cultivating implements. Bush, 2:26, notes that Proverbs 6:31 speaks of a "sevenfold" restoration; but this no doubt is an expression for a full, complete, or abundant repayment (cf. Ge 4:24; Pss 12:6; 79:12).

Breaking (see Notes) and entering (vv.2 – 3) a home in the night exposes the intruder to the loss of his life (justifiable homicide), in which case the householder will not be held responsible (cf. Jer 2:34 for its use as a metaphor). Such invasion during the daylight hours is a different situation, since there would be witnesses and the scope of the intruder's intentions (whether just to steal or also to kill) can be assessed. Eshnunna Law 13 makes this same distinction between nighttime and daytime intrusions.

When the goods have been sold or consumed and the thief has nothing with which to repay his crime, then he must be sold into servitude —presumably until he has repaid the debt. But if the stolen goods are still in his possession, then there is hope of repentance and voluntary restitution. At least the original owner can be reunited with his own animal, and the penalty is that the thief must provide a similar animal. When the thief voluntarily confesses, Leviticus 6:4 – 5 requires that he add only one-fifth to the theft (cf. Nu 5:6 – 7).

5 – 6 A fourth type of property damage involves (1) letting livestock graze in another person's field (v.5) and (2) letting a fire get out of control so that it burns over a neighbor's field (v.6). The identical situations appear, only in reverse order, in Hittite Laws 105 – 7. Notice that both vv.5 and 6 begin with *kî* ("if "), meaning that they are treated as separate laws.

Thus people are held responsible not only for the harm they *do* but also for the harm they *occasion* (Bush, 2:26), even though they may not have purposely designed the damage that ensued. The restitution will be the top yield that field has ever produced if the whole field is ruined, or, if not, the choicest sections left will be the standard for the whole field.

7 – 15 The last section on property damage treats four classes of goods entrusted to other persons for their custody or use.

The first case involved leaving valuable (*kesep*; sometimes translated "money," but coined "money" as we know it was not minted till the seventh century BC) articles (vv.7 – 9) or stuff (*kēlîm*) for safekeeping only to discover a thief stealing them. The thief is to make a double restitution (as v.4 specified). Compare a similar twofold penalty for the dishonest bailee in Code of Hammurabi 120, 124, 126, and in a case of theft, 125. But unlike the biblical laws, Hammurabi demanded the death penalty for the apprehended thief (Code 6 – 11).

The same situation appears in vv.8 – 9, only the identity of the thief is not known, and thus there is a suspicion that the keeper may have embezzled these securities. The bailee must appear before "the judges" (*hā'ᵉlōhîm*, as in 21:6 [see Notes]; 22:8 – 9[7 – 8], 28[27] mg.; 1Sa 2:25 [NIV mg.]; Pss 58:1; 82:1, 6),

where a deposition of innocence is taken as an oath before God in court. Though this text does not specifically mention an oath, the phrase ,*im-lô*, (lit., “whether not”) is used elsewhere so frequently as the oath formula that we cannot take it as anything else here (the oath is mentioned in v.11).Verse 8 is the general rule, and v.9 specifies charges of misappropriation or breach of trust.

The second case (vv.10 – 11) deals with animals entrusted to another that are mutilated in the pasture, injure themselves, or are driven off by robbers.

The same oath in court is required, since there are no witnesses and only God can finally decide the keeper’s culpability. Interestingly enough, the name of Yahweh is used in the oath in v.11 rather than “the Elohim” as in vv.8 – 9. This is hardly a sufficient basis for detecting two literary sources for this material, since Elohim is being used here in the specialized sense of “judges.”

In the third case (vv.12 – 13), the animal given for safekeeping is stolen. Since the bailee is negligent in guarding the animal, he must make restitution by giving the owner an animal for the one stolen. But if the animal given for safekeeping is torn to pieces by wild animals, he needs only produce the evidence of this fact, and no payment is required. Code of Hammu-rabi 266 – 67 is similar but deal with an outbreak of infections, calling them “the stroke of a god” and also exempting the keeper. (For other laws on livestock being devoured by wild beasts in Mesopotamian law, see Sumerian Law 8, New Sumerian fragments iii, 9’ – 11’, and Code of Hammurabi 75 and 244.)

The last case (vv.14 – 15) treats the problem of a hired beast’s being injured or dying while the owner is not present. Since neglect is presumed, a full replacement is required. However, if the owner is present, the wages agreed on are regarded as sufficient to offset the hazard run by the owner in renting out his property; and his firsthand witness to the deed will take away all suspicion of negligence.

NOTES

1[21:37] The maximum restitution in Exodus is חֲמִשָּׁה (*ḥᵉmiššâ*, “five”). Hittite

Laws 57 – 59 went as high as thirtyfold, which later was reduced to fifteenfold. Code of Hammurabi 8 also has thirtyfold.

2[22:1] בַּמַּחְתֶּרֶת (*bammaḥteret*, "breaking in") is literally "digging through" the walls, since the homes were frequently made of thick, dried mud walls (cf. Job 24:16; Eze 8:8; cf. also the Greek word in Mt 24:43 for "be broken into"). אֵין לוֹ דָמִים (*ʾên lô dāmîm*, "he is not guilty of bloodshed") is literally, "not to him blood." The blood, or value of that life (Ge 9:6), is not placed on him.

5[4] In יַבְעֶר ... בְּעִירָה וּבָעַר (*yaḇʿer ... bᵉʿîrōh ûḇāʿar*, "grazes his livestock . . . and they graze"), the verbs *yaḇʿer* and *bāʿar* are denominative verbs from *bᵉʿîrōh* ("livestock"). There may be some wordplay here since the word *bāʿar* means "to burn" as well as "to graze"; cf. the next verse: הַמַּבְעִר (*hammaḇʿîr*, "the one who started the fire").

8[7] The oath formula אִם־לֹא (*ʾim-lō*ʾ is unusual here) in אִם־לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ (*ʾim-lō*ʾ *šālaḥ yādô*, "to determine whether he has laid his hands [on another man's property]"), unless it be taken simply as "whether" (cf. P. Humbert, "Entendre la main," *VT* 12 [1962]: 383 – 95).

14[13] "Borrows" for יִשְׁאַל (*yišʾal*) is the same meaning we gave the verb שׁאל ("to ask" or "to borrow") in the contexts of 3:22 and 11:2. Paul, 94, regards וְנִשְׁבַּר אוֹ־מֵת (*wᵉnišbar ʾô-mēt*, "it is injured or dies") as a hendiadys similar to the Akkadian Nuzi phrase *ul-te-eb-ir-šu u` im-tu-ut* ("injuries that lead to an animal's death"; lit., "he injured it so that it died"). See the new JPS Torah translation.

6. Laws on Society (22:16 – 31)

16"If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps
with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. 17If her
father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price
for virgins.
18"Do not allow a sorceress to live.
19"Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death.
20"Whoever sacrifices to any god other than the LORD must be
destroyed.

21“Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him, for you were aliens in Egypt.
22“Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. 23If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.
25“If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not be like a moneylender; charge him no interest. 26If you take your neighbor’s cloak as a pledge, return it to him by sunset, 27because his cloak is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? When he cries out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate.
28“Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people.
29“Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats.
“You must give me the firstborn of your sons. 30Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for seven days, but give them to me on the eighth day.
31“You are to be my holy people. So do not eat the meat of an animal torn by wild beasts; throw it to the dogs.

COMMENTARY

16 – 17 The law on the seduction of a maiden not yet engaged is different from that dealing with the seduction of the betrothed girl in Deuteronomy 22:23, where violence is also involved. The seducer must pay the bride-price (see Notes) and agree to marry her. Should this offer of marriage be rejected by the girl’s father, the man must still pay the bride-price. As Bush, 2:30, remarks, this payment and offer do not clear the guilt of sin committed here, for cleansing is needed by repentance. Middle Assyrian Law 56 treats the same case and requires the seducer to pay one-third of the bride-price, and the father is permitted to do as he wishes.

18 The expression “not allow . . . to live” (*lō᾽ tᵉḥ.ayyeh*) is a technical term for placing something under the ban (Nu 31:15; Dt 20:16; 1Sa 27:9 – 11). On “sorceress,” see the Notes. Sorcery is punished in the Code of Hammurabi 2 by drowning in a river. Middle Assyrian Law A, 47, prescribes death for all those making magical preparations, and Hittite Laws 9 – 10 require the one who bewitches another to make a cash settlement with the bewitched and to pay the

physician for any resulting illness.

19 This law, written in a participial form as 21:12, 15 – 17; 22:20, forbids bestiality (as do Lev 18:23; 20:15 – 16; Dt 27:21. The Hittite Laws 187 – 88, 199:16 – 18 proscribe this evil involving a sheep, cow, or pig with the threat of a sentence of death unless pardoned by the king, but 199:20 – 22 and 200:23 – 5 do not apply bestiality to sexual relations with a horse or mule, as the Bible does (Cassuto, 290 – 91; Hyatt, 241). Apparently, this offensive sexual act was prevalent among the Canaanites.

20 All who sacrifice to any god other than Yahweh "will be dedicated for destruction" (my tr.; see Notes). Notice Deuteronomy 17:2 – 5 for a parallel law.

21 – 27 These verses treat various forms of oppression against the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the alien. Since these people have few or no natural protectors in society, they are to be shielded in their vulnerable estate. There are two shifts in these verses: (1) a shift to the first person, which places none other than God as the special protector and advocate of these underprivileged people, and (2) a shift to the second-person plural in vv.22 – 24, which some regard as being more Deuteronomic in origin, but no proof exists beyond this observation on style.

Like the sojourner or resident alien in v.21, widows and orphans (vv.22 – 24) are to be protected (see 23:11; Lev 19:9 – 10; Dt 14:21; 16:11, 14; 24:19 – 21; 26:12 – 13; Ps 94:6; Isa 1:23; 10:2; Jer 7:3 – 6; 22:3; Zec 7:10; Mal 3:5; Mt 23:14 [NIV mg.]). There are many other similar verses in the wisdom books of the OT, but it is the prophets who chide Israel for their neglect in this area, for the cry of the weak and oppressed come directly to God (cf. Jacob in Ge 31:42).

The laws dealing with interest on loaned money are dealt with in vv.25 – 27 (and more fully in Lev 25:35 – 37; Dt 15:7; 23:19 – 20; a negative stance on usury is also apparent in Neh 5:6 – 12; Job 24:9; Pr 28:8; Eze 18:13; 22:12). In fact, the righteous person may be defined as the one "who lends his money without usury [*nešek*]" in Psalm 15:5 and "does not lend at usury [*nešek*] or take excessive interest [*tar-bît*]" in Ezekiel 18:8 (cf. vv.13, 17). But note also Deuteronomy 23:20, "You may charge a foreigner interest [*nešek*], but not a brother Israelite." This law is not dealing with "usury" in our modern sense of

the word, i.e., exorbitant or illegal interest, but interest of any kind to a fellow Israelite. The main problem is that charging interest of one's brother is a way of avoiding responsibility to the poor and to one's fellow human (see Notes).

Retaining one's outer garment (used as temporary collateral) overnight is strictly forbidden, for even an interest-free loan apparently required some type of pledge or security (vv.26 – 27). But this cloak or poncho, which doubled as a blanket at night, is needed when evening comes; otherwise the cold will be as vexing as the requiring of interest. Compare Code of Hammurabi 114 – 16 and Middle Assyrian Laws A, 39, 44, 48.

28 Any word or deed that detracts from the glory of God is a reviling or cursing of his name (see comment on 20:7). Similarly care must be taken not to curse any who are in authority, for the penalty for cursing God and the king is death (1Ki 21:10; for cursing God alone, Lev 24:15 – 16; for cursing the king alone, 2Sa 16:9; 1Ki 2:8 – 9). On the term for "ruler," see the Notes. "God" (*Elohim*) cannot mean "judges" in this context, since it usually has the article when it is used in that sense; see, however, v.9b[8b].

29 – 30 The law of the firstfruits requires that the following firstfruits be offered to God: (1) "the fullness of your harvest and the outflow [lit., 'the tear'] of your presses" (lit. tr., v.29), (2) the firstborn of their children (v.29b), and (3) the firstborn of the cattle (v.30). The children are to be redeemed by a money payment or by the substituted service of one Levite for each firstborn (13:13; Nu 3:46 – 48). They are not to "hold back" or "delay" to do these things, even though the text seems to be aware of natural human reluctance (cf. the theological significance of this request in our discussion on 4:22 – 23). On the seven days that firstborn are allowed to stay with their mother, see Leviticus 22:27. Rawlinson, 2:192, is no doubt correct when he explains that the main purpose is to give natural relief to the dam by suckling its offspring.

31 Underlining all these instructions on societal relations is this call to service: "You are to be my holy people." Such a noble calling as Yahweh's firstborn son (4:22) or his "treasured possession . . . kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (19:5 – 6) demands noble living. Animals killed by another are unclean for two reasons: (1) the carnivorous beasts that tear it are unclean, and (2) the blood of such a slain animal will remain in its tissues, leaving it unclean. Instead, the

people are to toss that meat to the dogs. “Men of holiness” (lit. tr. of ‚anše-qōdeš) are to be separate in inward principle and outward practice — one of which is illustrated here.

Notes

7[16] A hl;WtB] (betûlâ, “virgin”), like the Akkadian batuµltu, was an unmarried girl who was always presumed to be a virgin. This is not the same word found in Isaiah 7:14. On rh/mo (moµhar, “bride-price”), TWOT no. 1153; cf. S. Loewenstamm, “rhm,” Encyclopaedia Biblica (Jerusalem, 1962), 4:702 - 6.

18[17] מְכַשֵּׁפָה (mᵉkaššēpâ, “sorceress”) is the feminine form of mᵉkaššēp (“magician, sorcerer”), which some allege comes from the root kāšap (GK 4175), meaning “to cut.” The Piel form of this verb is to use incantations, magic, sorcery, or the arts of witchcraft. The Greeks use *pharmakos* (“poisoner”) for a sorcerer, since such people dealt in drugs and pharmaceutical potions.

יָחֳרָם (yāḥᵒrām) means “[he] must be destroyed.” Ḥerem (GK 3051) is something devoted to God; however, it is not a voluntary but an involuntary dedication. It is now set apart to be banned from the earth and will totally come back to God. Thus a wall, as it were (cf. the king’s wives, or “harem,” who were walled off from others), isolates the anathematized person, place, or thing from anyone touching, using, or benefiting from it ever again. Compare Achan’s sin of taking the “devoted” items set apart for destruction in Joshua 7:13.

Notice the use of the *lamed* with the qameṣ in לֵאלֹהִים (lāᵓlōhîm, “to the gods” or “to any god”). Only in Psalm 86:8 is ᵓlōhîm also used as a common noun with a prepositional prefix and a *qames*.

25[24] נֶשֶׁךְ (nešek, “interest”; GK 5968) usually occurs with another word, *m/tarbît* (GK 5270/9552), which also means “interest” (Lev 25:36 – 37; Pr 28:8; Eze 18:8, 13, 17). *Nešek* appears alone in this passage and in Deuteronomy 23:20 and Psalm 15:5. The Talmud’s *Baba Mes.ia* 60b and D. H. Muller (*Semitica: Sprach und rechtšergleichende Studien*, Part 1 [Akademie der wissenschaften in Wien, Philosophisch-historische Klasse (1906)]: 13 – 19) came to the conclusion that both words meant approximately the same thing:

“interest.”

One school of thought, represented by S. Loewenstamm (“Neshek and M/Tarbit,” *JBL* 88 [1961]: 78 – 80), made the distinction over the *substance* of the thing loaned: *nešek* referred to a loan of money and *m/tarbît* referred to the loan of foodstuffs. Another school made the distinction over the *method* by which compensation for the loan was computed: *nešek* was “a long term, year recurring form of interest,” and *tarbît* was a “fixed rate of interest for a small loan of money or grain to be paid together with the capital after the harvest” (S. Stein, “Interest Taken by Jews From Gentiles,” *JSS* 1 [1956]: 163). S. Stein (“The Laws on Interest in the Old Testament,” *JTS* 4 [1953]) and Edward Neufeld (“The Prohibition Against Loans at Interest in Ancient Hebrew Laws,” *HUCA* 26 [1955]) both espouse the widely held view that *nešek* was derived from a Hebrew root meaning “to bite”; hence the “interest” was that which was “bitten off ” or deducted before the loan was advanced. *Tarbît* on the other hand, meant “increase” and referred to the additional sum above the principal. But the debate is not easily settled. Loewenstamm’s argument is the most convincing solution, but his theory fails to account for Deuteronomy 23:20 – 21.

The best sense spoken on this whole topic is from Hillel Gamoran (“The Biblical Law against Loans on Interest,” *JNES* 30 [1971]: 127 – 34). He writes (131): “The prohibition against interest was written with the poor in mind. Commercial loans were not explicitly banned because they were not considered. Out of sixteen biblical passages dealing with loans (but not with interest), not one deals with a commercial loan. Commercial loans simply did not come under the biblical purview.” (The sixteen passages are as follows: Dt 15:1 – 11; 24:10 – 13; 28:12; 1Sa 22:2; 2Ki 4:1; Ne 5:4; 10:31; Pss 37:21 – 26; 109:11; 112:5; Pr 19:17; 22:7, 26; Isa 24:2; 50:1; Jer 15:10.)

28[27] The precise meaning of נָשִׂיא (*nāśîʾ*, “ruler”; GK 5954) is debated. For Noth, the (*ʿal-tāšet yādʿkā*). was a tribal representative in the premonarchical amphictyony (cf. Nu 1:5 – 16; 13:1 – 15; 34:17 – 28; Hyatt, 244). E. Speiser and J. van der Ploeg more convincingly argued that (*ʿal-tāšet yādʿkā*). designated a single overall ruler, a king (see Childs, 479).

7. Laws on Justice and Neighborliness (23:1 – 9)

[1]"Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness.

[2]"Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, [3]and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit.

[4]"If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. [5]If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it.

[6]"Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. [7]Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

[8]"Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.

[9]"Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt.

COMMENTARY

1 Most of the regulations in this section are apodictic laws (using the second-person singular form) on court cases. Whereas most of the previous sections of the covenantal code have stressed love and compassion toward the weak, the poor, and the alien, this section exhorts Israel to practice another virtue: justice.

The prohibition against slander in v.1 (whether in court or not) is an amplification of the ninth commandment (cf. the injunction of Lev 19:16 and the cases of Dt 22:13 – 19; 1Ki 21:10 – 13). The clause "do not help a wicked man" is the NIV's rendering of "set your hand with" מְכַשֵּׁפָה (*mᵉkaššēpâ*, "sorceress")

2 – 3 Justice demands impartiality rather than unwarranted compliance with the "many" (v.2, *rabbîm*; NIV, "crowd") or favoritism to the poor (v.3; cf. Lev 19:15). In late Hebrew *rabbîm* meant "the mighty," giving an excellent contrast with the "poor man" or "the humble" (*dāl*). However, as Childs, 481, argues, the original sense is probably "the many," and the verb "follow after" fits this meaning as it does in 1 Kings 16:21.

4 – 5 Deuteronomy 22:1 – 3 gives fuller details on a man's responsibility to his brother in the matter of restoring a lost animal or helping one in difficulty. This act of compassion is owed to one another regardless of whether the individual is an enemy (v.4) or one who hates him (v.5; cf. kindness to one's enemy commanded in Job 31:29; Pr 25:21 – 22). Never does the OT command, "Hate your enemy," as the oral tradition of Jesus' day enjoined (Mt 5:43).

6 – 8 Cassuto, 298, argues that *ʾebyōnᵉkā* ("your poor people") is better understood here as "your opponent, adversary" (a synonym for "your enemy," v.4, and "the one hating you," v.5). Thus the suffix "your" is more easily understood, and the meaning is thus: When called to testify or to adjudicate between your enemy and someone else, do not pervert the judgment against your enemy just because that person is your enemy.

Verse 7 warns against the very thing Jezebel later did to Naboth (1Ki 21:10 – 13). Justice demands that people distance themselves from any false charges (cf. v.1). God will not hold such persons or judges guiltless.

Verse 8 is repeated almost verbatim in Deuteronomy 16:19. Bribery must have been a common temptation, for numerous passages warn against it.

9 This verse is similar in wording and motivation to 22:21, but it is placed here because this should be one of the great motivators for all Israelites to exercise justice: Remember how you felt when you were aliens (and all that implies) in Egypt.

NOTE

5 Cassuto, 297, and later W. F. Albright (*Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968], 104, n. 130) take the verb *ʿzb* in עָזֹב תַּעְזֹב עִמּוֹ (*ʿāzōb taʿᵃzōb ʿimmô*, "be sure you help him with it") to be the same as the Ugaritic *ʿdb* ("to arrange, adjust"). Hence the rendering would be, "You shall adjust its load."

8. Laws on Sacred Seasons (23:10 – 19)

10 “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, 11 but
during the seventh year let the land lie unplowed and unused. Then the poor
among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat
what they leave. Do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove.
12 “Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that
your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household,
and the alien as well, may be refreshed.
13 “Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the
names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips.
14 “Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me.
15 “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread
made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in
the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.
“No one is to appear before me empty-handed.
16 “Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow
in your field.
“Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you
gather in your crops from the field.
17 “Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign
LORD.
18 “Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything
containing yeast.
“The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning.
19 “Bring the best of the fi rstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD
your God. “Do not cook a young goat in its mother’s milk.

COMMENTARY

10 – 12 The text turns to commandments that apply to seasons and days that are to be set aside to the service of God. The laws on the Sabbath year and the Sabbath day begin this section. Every seventh year the land is to have “a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD” (Lev 25:4). The land must lie fallow during that year; the two verbs in v.11 are *šmṭ* (“to let drop, remit”) and *nṭš* (“to leave, abandon”). The motivation for this legislation is given in v.11; it is to favor the

poor and the wild animals. In Leviticus 25:1 – 7, 18 – 22, the reasons are more theological than civil.

Verse 12 repeats the fourth commandment so that no one will gain the impression that once the sabbatical year has been observed, all ordinary observances of the regular Sabbath will no longer be required. This repetition of 20:8 – 9 adds an additional reason for its observance: so that humans and beasts alike might "be refreshed" (*yinnāpēš*).

13 This caution against idolatry summarizes all the divine precepts given above: literally, "in all things that I have said to you." "Do not let them be heard on your lips" is paralleled by (lit.) "you shall not cause [all these things] to be remembered" (*lō' tazkîrû*; NIV, "do not invoke"). The Hiphil form of *zkr* ("to remember") has the meaning "to invoke" in the Psalms; so also here. A "day" will come when God will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they would "be remembered" no more (Hos 2:17; Zec 13:2). This is the practice of David in Psalm 16:4 (note Ex 20:3; Jos 23:7).

14 – 17 These verses deal with the three great annual pilgrimage feasts: the Feast of Unleavened Bread at the beginning of the barley harvest in the spring, commemorating the exodus (v.15; see also 12:34; Lev. 23:5 – 8, 10 – 14); the Feast of Harvest (also called the Feast of Weeks in 34:22) at the end of the spring harvest of grain, commemorating the giving of the law (v.16a); and the Feast of Ingathering of the summer crops of olives and grapes in early autumn, commemorating the wilderness wanderings (v.16b). Most of this material is found again in 34:18 – 26 and expanded in Leviticus 23. All three feasts are both agricultural and historical and require the annual attendance of all men (v.17).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread begins with Passover and lasts seven days, with a holy convocation on the first and last days. The rule for all the feasts was, "No one is to appear before me empty-handed" (v.15). Fifty days after the offering of the barley sheaf as the "firstfruits" of the harvest, the Feast of Harvest, known later as Pentecost, is to be celebrated (v.16; cf. Lev 23:15 – 22; Dt 16:9 – 11 for this one-day festival). The Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles (v.16; cf. Lev 23:33 – 36; Dt 16:13; 31:10; Jn 7:2) is a kind of thanksgiving festival. It was grossly neglected for many periods of Israel's history (Ne 8:17).

18 This verse has nothing to do with eating anything leavened. Rather, it means that individual Israelites are not to kill the Passover lamb while leaven is still in their houses.

The second half of v.18 makes no reference to fat; but as the parallel verse in 34:25b says, the "sacrifice from the Passover Feast" (here lit., "sacrifice of my feast") shall not "remain until morning" (cf. 12:10). If the word "fat" is retained over the parallel text in 34:25b, which would make "fat of my feast" parallel to "sacrifice of my feast," then the householders are being told to destroy the intestinal fat by morning. But the first explanation (i.e., the presence of leaven) is preferred. (For this interpretation see Norman Snaith, "Exodus 23:18 and 34:25," *JTS* 20 [1969]: 533 – 4.)

19 The laws of firstfruits and its theology have already been discussed in 4:22; 11:5; 12:29. This must be brought into the house of God yet to be described.

The prohibition of cooking a young goat in its mother's milk (see also 34:26; Dt 14:21b) has been explained since 1933 by a reference in a broken passage of a thirteenth-century BC Ugaritic text called "The Birth of the Gods Pleasant and Beautiful" (text 52, line 14). It is generally agreed that the reference is to a fertility rite that entails boiling a kid in milk; but there is no sure reference to the milk of its mother in the broken Ugaritic text. Calum M. Carmichael ("On Separating Life and Death: An Explanation of Some Biblical Laws," *HTR* 69 [1976]: 1 – 7, esp. 2) concludes: "The crux of the matter is simply, that the young dead kid is being cooked in the very milk that was its life-giving sustenance." See Jacob Migrom,"You Shall Not Boil a Kid in Its Mother's Milk," *BRev* 1/3 (1985): 48 – 55; Robert J. Ratner and Bruce Zuckerman, "In Rereading the "'Kid in Milk' Inscriptions," *BRev* 1/3 (1985): 56 – 58.

NOTES

10 The *waw* that begins this verse is both antithetic, "but," and an example of *casus pendens,* "but in regard to the seventh year" (Cassuto, 300).

14 Literally, רְגָלִים (*r'gālîm*, "times") is "feet"; perhaps "three foot-journeys" are

required each year. Notice that v.17 uses the more regular *pᶜāmîm* (“times”).

9. Epilogue (23:20 – 33)

20 “See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way
and to bring you to the place I have prepared. 21 Pay attention to him and
listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your
rebellion, since my Name is in him. 22 If you listen carefully to what he says
and do all that I say, I will be an enemy to your enemies and will oppose
those who oppose you. 23 My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into
the land of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites and
Jebusites, and I will wipe them out. 24 Do not bow down before their gods or
worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break
their sacred stones to pieces. 25 Worship the LORD your God, and his
blessing will be on your food and water. I will take away sickness from
among you, 26 and none will miscarry or be barren in your land. I will give
you a full life span.
27 “I will send my terror ahead of you and throw into confusion every
nation you encounter. I will make all your enemies turn their backs and run.
28 I will send the hornet ahead of you to drive the Hivites, Canaanites and
Hittites out of your way. 29 But I will not drive them out in a single year,
because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too
numerous for you. 30 Little by little I will drive them out before you, until
you have increased enough to take possession of the land.
31 “I will establish your borders from the Red Sea to the Sea of the
Philistines, and from the desert to the River. I will hand over to you the
people who live in the land and you will drive them out before you. 32 Do
not make a covenant with them or with their gods. 33 Do not let them live in
your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of
their gods will certainly be a snare to you.”

COMMENTARY

20 – 22 An epilogue concludes the Book of the Covenant. Israel is promised

the angel of God, every protection, and success, provided they remain faithful to the covenant (see similar promises in 33:1 – 3; 34:11 – 16; Lev 26:3 – 11; Dt 7:13 – 15; 28:1 – 14).

The angel mentioned here cannot be Moses, God's messenger, or an ordinary angel;for the expressions are too high for any of these: "he will not forgive your rebellion" (who can forgive sin but God alone?) and "my Name is in him" (v.22). This must be the angel of the covenant (cf. Isa 63:9; Mal 3:1), the second person of the Trinity. (See our discussion in Exodus 33 and in *Old Testament Theology*, 120, for four forms of Yahweh's divine presence.) Just as Yahweh's name resided in his temple (Dt 12:5, 11; 1Ki 8:29), so this angel with the authority and prestige of God's name is evidence enough that God himself is present in his Son. Obedience to the angel will result in all of the blessings listed in the text. Israel is commanded, "Do not rebel against him" (v.21); yet they do just that (Nu 14:11; Ps 78:17, 40, 56).

23 – 26 On the nations listed here, see comment on 3:8. All of these nations God's angel will "wipe . . . out" (v.23), i.e., remove from their national, not necessarily personal, existence; for surely David had Hittites in his army (2Sa 23:39) and was friendly with a Jebusite (2Sa 24:18 – 24). It is the worship and practices of the gods of these nations that are strictly forbidden. Instead, Israel is to demolish these gods and smash their "sacred stones" (v.24).

Apparently, these *maṣṣēbôt* were free-standing stones associated with the veneration of deities, particularly the male deity. Examples of these stones have been found at Gezer, Byblos, Ras Shamra, and especially Hazor, where one was found with an offering at its base by the entrance to an important building in the Canaanite citadel (Y. Yadin, "The Fourth Season of Excavation at Hazor," *BA* 22 [1959]: 14, fig. 12).

The worship of God will affect the Israelites' water and food (v.25). No wonder the prophets connect a series of agricultural reverses with God's judgment (e.g., Hag 1:5 – 11). Moreover, unlike the wicked, who fail to live out half their days (Ps 55:23), the worshiping obedient will have full life spans (v.26).

27 – 30 God (in addition to his angel in vv.20, 23) will also send panic and

confusion to every nation Israel faces (v.27). He will also send "the hornet" (*haṣṣiʿâ*, always singular; it occurs only here and in Dt 7:20; Jos 24:12). It is unnecessary to revocalize the text to translate it as "leprosy" or "discouragement" (see Hyatt, 252). Perhaps "the hornet" is a symbol of Egypt, just as Isa 7:18 uses the "fly" and the "bee" as symbols of Egypt and Assyria, respectively.

The speed of the conquest is stated differently in several texts. Judges 2:20 – 3:4 also argues for gradual progress in conquering the land; yet Deuteronomy 9:3 promises it will be done "quickly." The answer lies in noting that the general sweep of the land and its conquest in principle is accomplished speedily. Because of mopping-up operations, however, and the need to have people settle in the areas rid of Canaanite influence and the threat of wild animals infesting them (cf. 2Ki 17:25), the completion of that task will be designedly slow.

31 – 33 The borders God establishes will be from Yam Suph (here an eastern boundary), the Gulf of Aqabah, with its port city of Elath, to the "Sea of the Philistines," the Mediterranean Sea on the west; from the desert in the south, the Negev, to "the River" (*hannāhār*) in the north. But is this "River" the River Euphrates? It seems better to equate "the River" with a river that preserves the same name in Arabic today, located in a valley north of the Lebanese mountains, currently serving as the boundary between Lebanon and Syria. The Arabic name is *Nahr el Kebir* (lit., "The Great River"; cf. the same name in Hebrew: Ge 15:18; Dt 1:7; Jos 1:4). This description traces limits given to Abraham in Genesis 15:18 and comes close to matching the extent of the united kingdom under David and Solomon (2Sa 8:3 – 14; 10:6 – 19; 1Ki 4:21, 24; 2Ch 9:26).

No covenant is to be made with these people (though the Gibeonites do succeed in making one, Jos 9:3 – 15).The potential snare of their gods, practices, and worship is too great; thus there is to be no peaceful coexistence between these nations and Israel in Canaan.

NOTE

31 On הַנָּהָר (*hannāhār*, "the River"), see the excellent discussion and argument for our Lebanese identification in George W. Buchanan, *The Consequences of the Covenant* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 91 – 109; J. Simons, *Geographical and*

Topographical Texts (Leiden: Brill, 1959), 94 – 105. See also W. C. Kaiser Jr., "The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View," *BSac* 138 (1981): 303 – 5.

F. Ratification of the Covenant (24:1 – 18)

OVERVIEW

The narrative, temporarily interrupted for the contents of the "Book of the Covenant" (20:22 – 23:33), is resumed from 20:21. Moses and his aides are to ascend ("Come up," v.1) the mountain *after* the actions mentioned in vv.3 – 8 have been completed.

> [1]Then he said to Moses, "Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab
> and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. You are to worship at a
> distance, [2]but Moses alone is to approach the LORD; the others must not
> come near. And the people may not come up with him."
>
> [3]When Moses went and told the people all the LORD's words and laws,
> they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will
> do." [4]Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said.
>
> He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the
> mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of
> Israel. [5]Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings
> and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. [6]Moses
> took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on
> the altar. [7]Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people.
> They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."
>
> [8]Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is
> the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance
> with all these words."
>
> [9]Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel
> went up [10]and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a
> pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. [11]But God did not raise
> his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate
> and drank.

[12]The LORD said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay
here, and I will give you the tablets of stone, with the law and commands I
have written for their instruction.”
[13]Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the
mountain of God. [14]He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come
back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute
can go to them.”
[15]When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, [16]and the
glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered
the mountain, and on the seventh day the LORD called to Moses from
within the cloud. [17]To the Israelites the glory of the LORD looked like a
consuming fi re on top of the mountain. [18]Then Moses entered the cloud as
he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and
forty nights.

COMMENTARY

1 “Nadab and Abihu,” Aaron’s two eldest sons, would have been high priests after Aaron. They died, however, under God’s judgment because of their perverse deed (Lev 10:1 – 2; Nu 3:4).The official “seventy elders” of Numbers 11:16 have not been formally appointed yet. They are selected here to represent the twelve tribes, perhaps representing Jacob’s seventy descendants.

2 Moses alone is to function as the mediator between God and the Israelites, just as Christ is designated as the second Moses in Hebrews 3:1 – 6 and thus is the mediator of the new covenant (Heb 12:24).

3 When the people promise to obey and observe all that the Lord has said, they do not exchange the blessings of promise for the law. The keeping of the “LORD’s words and laws” is to be based on the prior provision of sacrificial blood. The blood cleanses men and women so that “doing” and “obeying” become possible for them. This is not “doing” to merit favor or salvation (see comment on 19:8).

4 This passage testifies to Moses’ direct involvement in the composition of the book of Exodus. That “Moses then wrote down everything” agrees with his

recording the account of the war on Amalek (17:14) and the writing of the Ten Commandments by the "finger of God" (31:18). See comment on 17:14.

The "twelve stone pillars" represent the twelve tribes (Jos 4:5, 20; 1Ki 18:31). Contrast the evil of "sacred stones" in 23:24, attested in excavations such as those at Gezer.

5 The "young Israelite men" are the firstborn, who officiate until the Levites are appointed in their place in Numbers 3:41 (see comment and Notes on 19:22, 24).

6 Both the altar and the people are sprinkled with half of the blood, each in an act of dedication or consecration. Hebrews 9:19 does not mention the altar but speaks of the "book" or "scroll" of the covenant as also being sprinkled with blood. It is probably not correct to speak, as some do, of the altar as representing the Lord on the basis of Genesis 15:9 – 10, 17. This is a rite of purification (not the water, scarlet wool, and hyssop of Lev 14:6 – 7 and Heb 9:19 – 20). The division of the blood points to the twofold aspect of the blood of the covenant: (1) the blood on the altar symbolizes God's forgiveness and acceptance of the offering, and (2) the blood on the people points to a blood oath that binds them in obedience. In other words, the keeping of the words and laws is made possible by the sacrificial blood of the altar.

7 The Book of the Covenant includes in its narrowest meaning in scholarly use today words from 20:22 to 23:33, but more fully, here, the contents of ch. 19, the Decalogue of ch. 20, and the case laws of 20:22 to 23:33.

8 The blood by which the covenant is ratified and sealed is the basis for the union between Yahweh and the people. This phrase becomes most important in the NT in its reappearance in the Lord's Supper (Mt 26:28; Mk 14:24; Lk 22:20; 1Co 11:25; Heb 9:20; 10:29; also Heb 12:24; 13:20; 1Pe 1:2).

9 – 10 That Moses and his company *see* "the God of Israel" at first appears to contradict 33:20; John 1:18; and 1 Timothy 6:16; but what they see is a "form ['similitude'] of the LORD" (Nu 12:8), just as Ezekiel (Eze 1:26) and Isaiah (Isa 6:1) saw an approximation, a faint resemblance and a sensible adumbration of the incarnate Christ who was to come. There is a deliberate obscurity in the form

and details of the one who produces such a splendid, dazzling effect on these observers of God's presence.

Under God's feet is a "pavement made of sapphire" (v.10), a deep blue or, more accurately, lapis lazuli of Mesopotamia, an opaque blue precious stone speckled with a golden yellow-colored pyrite. True sapphire, the transparent crystalline of corundum, was unknown in Egypt around 1400 BC It symbolizes the heavens (cf. Eze 1:22).

11 "God did not raise his hand against [lit., 'stretch out his hand'; cf. 9:15] these leaders" who see him. "Leaders" probably comes from the verb "to be deeply rooted," hence, "eminent ones, nobles, chief men."

In one of the most amazing texts in the Bible, these men see God. Verse 11 uses a different word from that in v.10; here it stresses inward, spiritual, or prophetic vision. "They ate and drank" describes a covenantal meal celebrating the sealing of the covenant described in vv.3 – 8. But there is no mention of God's participating in the eating or drinking as a human partner!

12 Once again Moses is told to "come up" (cf. v.1). This is the first mention of the "tablets of stone."

13 – 14 In response to God's call of Moses, Joshua accompanies him as they go farther up the mountain (v.13). "Aaron and Hur" (v.14), appointed as Moses' deputies in 17:10 and apparently as judges in 18:22, are left in charge. It is noteworthy that Hur does not appear in the golden calf incident (ch. 32). See comment on 17:10.

15 – 16 As Moses ascends the mountain, all he can see is a cloud (v.15). When the glory of God "settles" on the mountain, the same word (*šākan*) is used as the "shekinah" glory (cf. Jn 1:14, the Word "tabernacling" among us).

17 On "the glory of the LORD looked like a consuming fire," see comment on 16:10. The three symbols of God's glory (i.e., of his presence) are (1) the cloud, (2) the fire, and (3) the voice of God. The radiance of his presence is like a fiery furnace (cf. Heb 12:18, 29).

18 Once Moses enters the "cloud," he will not be seen again for "forty days and forty nights" (cf. Jesus' fast in Mt 4:2). During this time Moses receives all the instructions on the tabernacle and its furnishings (chs. 25 – 31). Not until ch. 32 do Moses and Joshua come down to face Israel's apostasy.

III. DIVINE WORSHIP (25:1 – 40:38)

OVERVIEW

The final sixteen chapters of Exodus center on the theology of the worship of God. The only interruption of this theme is the episode of the golden calf (chs. 32 – 34). But this section only contrasts the divinely appointed worship established in connection with the tabernacle with humanly devised worship that adores the work of human hands and leads to debauchery.

Chapters 25 – 31 describe God's command to build the tabernacle, while chs. 35 – 40 deal with the carrying out of the command of God. It is amazing that the construction could proceed after the debacle of the golden calf in chs. 32 – 34. Thus the very presence of the building is a testimony to God's grace. In Jewish exegesis, some put the command to build the sanctuary after Israel's worship of the bull-calf, but this flies in the face of the writer's intent as seen in the order of these Exodus chapters.

The sheer amount of text devoted to the topic of worship ought to demonstrate its importance. To be sure, some doubt the historicity of the tabernacle. The standard view of the hypothetical source theory is that the oldest tradition referred only to a simple tent of the congregation in 33:7 – 11, which was attributed to an alleged "E" source (= Elohim; a so-called northern E tradition, first written down c. 750 BC). The hypothetical "P" source (= so-called Priestly materials, first written down after the exile c. 450 BC) then developed the ideal design of 33:7 – 11, aided by the (already destroyed) temple of Solomon and the (unbuilt) temple of Ezekiel's vision (Eze 40 – 48).

Contrary to the claims of the hypothetical source theory, the text presents Exodus 25 – 40 as being historical. The source hypothesis fails to see that the tent of 33:7 – 11 is different from the tabernacle and was only a temporary structure (see comments on 33:7 – 11). The fact that the tabernacle describes a moveable and portable tent-like temple argues for its origins being among a nomadic people. One would have expected a settled people to have an unmovable, permanent structure. Here is another reason why an exilic date does not fit the evidence.

The most important question about the tabernacle deals with its significance. Some claim (e.g., Philo, Josephus) that the tabernacle represents the *universe* (the court = earth, the tabernacle itself = heaven, the lampstand = the seven planets, the bread of presence = the twelve months). Others (e.g., Cocceius) suggest the tabernacle represents the church (the court = the external visible church, the tent = the true invisible church, the Holy Place = the church militant, the Most Holy Place = the church trium-phant). Keil and Delitzsch, 2:166 – 67, held that the tabernacle embodied the kingdom of God established in Israel, especially since the text stresses forms, numbers, and measurements. This kingdom will one day come to completion and encompass the entire world, just as the Most Holy Place is a cube, which points to the completion of the kingdom of God (cf. Rev 21 – 22).

My view is closest to the kingdom-of-God meaning. The tabernacle, however, primarily embodies the theology of worship. It assumes that God is the great King who reigns and is therefore worthy of our praise and adoration. More specifically, the tabernacle signifies that God has come “to dwell,” or “to tabernacle,” in the midst of Israel, as he will one day come in the incarnation (Jn 1:14) and will come in the second advent (Rev 21:3). The Lord who dwelt in his visible glory in his sanctuary among his people (Ex 25:8) will one day come and dwell in all his glory among his saints forever.

A comment is necessary on the sequence of the work as given in the command section (chs. 25 – 31) versus the sequence found in the execution section (chs. 35 – 40).The command section focuses on the furnishings, beginning with the ark of the covenant (the place of atonement) as the focal item. It, therefore, takes a more *theological* stance. However, the execution section, with Bezalel’s advice, after noting that the materials are collected and the craftsmen appointed, deals with the tabernacle itself and then moves on to the furnishings in a more *logical*

progression from the point of view of construction.

A. The Tabernacle (25:1 – 31:18)

1. Collection of Materials (25:1 – 9)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give. [3]These are the offerings you are to receive from them: gold, silver and bronze; [4]blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fi ne linen; goat hair; [5]ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; [6]olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; [7]and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

[8]"Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. [9]Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 The "offering" (= contribution) mentioned here (v.2) is not a "heave offering" (KJV, ASV mg.) but one separated for a sacred purpose as a gift to be consecrated to the Lord. See the translation of "special gift" in Deuteronomy 12:6, 11, 17. It was also a voluntary gift, as v.2b stresses. Notice that "you" is plural and therefore refers to perhaps Moses and all the people, or it may be another example of Hebrew's using the plural pronoun to refer to an individual.

3 – 7 The fourteen components or materials that go into the tabernacle are listed. They include (1) gold, (2) silver, and (3) bronze. Then follow three colors of yarn.

(4) "Blue" (*t*ᵉ*kēlet*, v.4) is a color derived from a dye of a shellfish, variously described as sky blue, deep dark blue, blue-purple, or bright violet. Its significance is not stated. Some say it is the "heavenly character of Christ," but

scriptural support for this assertion is lacking.

(5) The color “purple” (ʾargāmān, v.4) is derived from the secretion of a gland of the murex snail and was supplied primarily by the Phoenicians. It is a purple-red. Although its significance is not stated, perhaps it speaks of royalty.

(6) The color “scarlet” (tôlaʿat, v.4), or crimson, is derived from the eggs and bodies of the worm *Coccus Ilicis*, which attaches itself to the leaves of the holly plant. Their maggots are collected, dried, and pulverized, and the powder produces a bright red (or yellow-red) dye. It is a part of the later heave offering. Its significance is not stated. Some say it is the “earthly aspect of the Son of Man.”

(7) “Fine linen” (šēš, v.4) translates an Egyptian loanword in Hebrew. Some linen found in Egyptian tombs has 152 threads per inch in the warp as compared to only 86 threads per inch in the most finely woven modern techniques. It is usually white. Its significance is not stated; perhaps it represents purity and righteousness.

(8) The “goat hair” (ʿizzîm, v.4) came from longhaired goats and was most likely black. This coarse material was often used to weave tents. Felt is a modern equivalent.

(9) The “ram skins” (ʿōrōt ʾêlîm, v.5) were skins that had all the wool removed and then were dyed red; it was like our morocco leather.

(10) The “hides of sea cows” (ʿōrōt tᵉḥāšîm, v.5) no doubt came from the East African sea cows (“porpoise” or “dolphin”) found in the Red Sea.

(11) “Acacia wood” (ʿᵃṣê šiṭṭîm, v.5) is a species of the mimosa (*Mimosa Nilotica*), whose wood is darker and harder than oak and therefore not subject to wood-eating insects. It is common in the Sinai Peninsula.

(12) There is also “olive oil” (v.6), made from crushing the olives, for lighting the tabernacle.

(13) The word for “spices” (*bśāmîm*, v.6) is derived from *bāsam* (“to have a good smell, be fragrant”). The four best species for anointing oil are identified in 30:22 – 25 as “myrrh” (sap of a balsam bush), “cinnamon” (bark of the cinnamon tree, a species of laurel bush), “cane” or sweet calamus (a pink-colored pith from the root of a reed plant), and “cassia” (from the dried flowers of the cinnamon tree). The four species for incense are identified in 30:34 – 38 as “gum resin” or “stacte” (KJV; a powder taken from the middle of the hardened drops of the myrrh bush, rare and very valuable), “onycha” (from the shell of a type of clam [mollusks] similar to the purple murex snail and found deep in the Red Sea), “galbanum” (a rubbery resin of thick milky juice from the roots of a flowering plant thriving in Syria and Persia), and “frankincense” (a resin from the bark of *Boswellia Carteri* growing in southern Arabia). This resin dripped spontaneously from the plant in the fall and was “pure,” without any foreign matter — pure “white” — hence its Hebrew name “whiteness.”

(14) The“onyx stones” (*ʾabnê šōham*, v.7) cannot be positively identified. The LXX translates it as “beryl,” mostly a sea-green color. Another suggestion is a chrysoprase quartz ranging in color from blue-green to yellow-green and apple-green. The Egyptians knew chrysoprase. For other gems mounted in the ephod and breastplate, see 28:6 – 25.

8 The “sanctuary” (*miqdāš*) means “holy” place or “the place set apart.” Everything about the tabernacle is holy. The same word in 1 and 2 Chronicles refers to the temple. Hebrews 9:1 calls the sanctuary, “the sanctuary of this world” (NIV, “earthly sanctuary”).

9 The most important word about the sanctuary is that it is to be built according to the “pattern” God will show Moses. The word “pattern” (*tabnît*) comes from the verb *bnh* (“to build”) — a word that signals typology is present, for this is only a “model, replica, or pattern” of the real thing (see v.40). *Tabnît* occurs twenty times in the OT. In Acts 7:44 and Hebrews 8:5 *typos* is used to translate *tabnît*. Houtman, 3:345 – 46, denies that there was a heavenly sanctuary (an “Urbild”) used as a real model separate from the tabernacle. Pseudo-Philo (9.15), however, argued that God showed Moses a *similitude* of the objects that he should make; thus we have a built-in warning that the tabernacle is temporary; the real is yet to come at some future time. What is now being constructed has a built-in obsolescence from its very beginning.

The word “tabernacle” (*miškān*) appears for the first time here of its 139 OT occurrences. It is from the root *škn* (“to dwell”) and is the place where God dwells among his people (cf. 29:42 – 46; Lev 26:9 – 12; Eze 37:26 – 28; cf. Rev 21:2 – 3).

NOTES

2 תְּרוּמָה (*tᵉrûmâ*, “offering, contribution”) can include sacrifices (29:27), money (30:13 – 15), produce (Nu 15:19 – 21), or land (Eze 45).

5 תְּחָשִׁים (*tᵉḥāšîm*,' “sea cows”) is used in Ezekiel 16:10 for the “leather” of women’s sandals. Most accept the Arabic cognate that means “dolphins” (see Childs, 523). This “leather” is then waterproof and suitable for the outer covering of the tabernacle.

2.Ark and Mercy Seat (25:10 - 22)

OVERVIEW

The first item in Moses’ instructions in the tabernacle is the ark of God, with its *kappōret* (“atonement cover”) above it. Tyndale was the first to render this word as “mercy seat,” followed by Luther in 1534. However, the ark is the place of atonement or propitiation, hence the place where God is rendered favorable to his people. Here we are taken immediately to the heart of the theology of the tabernacle and its purpose in Israel and now in the life of the church.

> [10]“Have them make a chest of acacia wood — two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. [11]Overlay it with pure gold, both inside and out, and make a gold molding around it. [12]Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. [13]Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. [14]Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to

carry it. [15]The poles are to remain in the rings of this ark; they are not to be removed. [16]Then put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you.

[17]"Make an atonement cover of pure gold — two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. [18]And make two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. [19]Make one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; make the cherubim of one piece with the cover, at the two ends. [20]The cherubim are to have their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim are to face each other, looking toward the cover. [21]Place the cover on top of the ark and put in the ark the Testimony, which I will give you. [22]There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.

COMMENTARY

10a The "chest" or "ark" (from the Latin *arca*) is mentioned 180 times, thereby stressing its importance. It is called "the ark of the Testimony" (v.16), "the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the earth" (Jos 3:11), "the sacred ark" (2Ch 35:3), and "the ark of your might" (Ps 132:8). It is the throne of God. Notice that God's instructions begin at the heart of things rather than working from the outside in (cf. also Heb 9:4; also H. J. Zobel, "אָרוֹן," *TDOT*, 1:363 – 74).

10b – 17 The dimensions of the ark are 3.75 feet long by 2.25 feet wide and high (v.10b mg.). It is to be overlaid with "pure gold" (v.11), from which silver and other impurities have been removed. It has a type of "molding" or "collar" (*zēr*) around it; the exact meaning and purpose of the *zeìr* is conjectural.

The meaning of *paʿʿmōtāyw* is uncertain, but "its . . . [artificial] feet" is probably closest to the basic meaning (v.12; cf. Jdg 5:28); the LXX renders it "corner" (cf. 1Ki 7:30; see also Ps 57:6; Pr 29:5; Isa 26:6).Whatever it is, the four gold rings are attached there. The "acacia wood" poles slide through the rings for transporting the chest (vv.13 – 14), and they are not to be removed from the rings (v.15). On the "Testimony" (v.16), see the Notes.

It seems best to view the rings as being attached to the foot of the ark rather

than to the upper corners. Thus those carrying the ark lifted it above their heads. Most assume that the rings are placed on the length rather than the breadth of the ark. The poles must have been permanently attached so that the ark will not slide from one side to the other, for not even those who carry it are ever to touch it (25:14, 15; see also 1Ki 8:8).

The verb that lies behind the noun “atonement” in the expression “atonement [cover]” (v.17) means “to ransom or deliver by means of a substitute.” (There is no word for “lid” or “cover” here.) The interpretation of a “cover” for the ark stems from the belief that the root *kpr* [GK 4105] means “to cover.” This is a confusion with another root of the same spelling that appeared in the flood story, where Noah’s ark is “covered” with bituminous material to caulk the boat, but that sense does not appear here.)

This term *(kappōret)* is mentioned twenty-seven times. The LXX has “propitiatory covering” or “mercy seat,” as does Hebrews 9:5 (NIV mg.). This place of expiating the sins of humankind is an adumbration of Christ’s propitiatory work (Ro 3:25; Heb 9:23 – 24; 1Jn 2:2) and is at the heart of our worship of the one who died for us. The fact that *kāpar* means “to deliver or to ransom one by a substitute” is what begins one of the greatest doctrines in the Bible, the vicarious substitutionary atonement by Messiah for the sins of the world.

18 – 22 A cherub (plural “cherubim”) is usually depicted as a composite or hybrid creature with wings, a human head, and a body combining elements of an ox, a lion, or an eagle (cf. Ge 3:24; Eze 1; Rev 4). In Egypt the sphinx was prevalent. In Assyria the same root word describes one who functioned as a temple guardian. In some manner the two cherubim are to be made from the cover itself and as part of it (v.19). They “face each other, looking toward the cover” (v.20; cf. 1Pe 1:12).

The phrase that describes God as the one who is “enthroned between the cherubim” (1Sa 4:4; 2Sa 6:2; 2Ki 19:15; Pss 80:2; 99:1) favors the argument that the throne of God is between the cherubim that are over the ark of God in the Most Holy Place. However, even though this interpretation is usually preferred, it must be noted that there is no preposition “between” in the epithet: *yōšēbhākkerûbîm.* It is noteworthy that in Psalm 22:3 Yahweh is “enthroned” on “the praises of Israel,” *yōšēbtᵉhillōt yiśrāʾel.* The epithet is almost the same and may indicate a

depersonalizing of the cherubim. One thing is sure: Yahweh's throne is central and remains over and above all the worship and even the clamor of the days.

Verse 22 gives the theological relevance of the ark and cherubim — indeed, of all of our worship of God: "There . .. I will meet with you." God is continually present in his tabernacle and walks among his people there (Lev 26:11 – 12). One of the primary intentions of worship is to meet with the living God. It is from his throne above the cherubim that he speaks and meets with his people (cf. 1Sa 4:4).

NOTES

16 עֵדֻת (*ʿēdut*) means "Testimony" or "laws" of the Ten Commandments that are placed inside the ark. In Egypt, Babylonia, and the Hittite empire, important documents were deposited in the sanctuary "at the feet" of the deity.

17 כַּפֹּרֶת (*kappōret,*' "atonement"; GK 4114) is rendered in the LXX as *hilasteìrion* ("propitiatory") and in the Vulgate as *hilastērion* The basic root of *kpr* means "to make an atonement," which in the verbal idea is "to ransom or deliver by offering a substitute" (see Kaiser, 117; G. L. Archer, *TWOT* no. 1023).

3. Table of the Bread of the Presence (25:23 – 30)

[23]"Make a table of acacia wood — two cubits long, a cubit wide and a cubit and a half high. [24]Overlay it with pure gold and make a gold molding around it. [25]Also make around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim. [26]Make four gold rings for the table and fasten them to the four corners, where the four legs are. [27]The rings are to be close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. [28]Make the poles of acacia wood, overlay them with gold and carry the table with them. [29]And make its plates and dishes of pure gold, as well as its pitchers and bowls for the pouring out of offerings. [30]Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times.

COMMENTARY

23 – 28 "Make a table" (v.23) has Moses as the implied subject, but in 37:1 it is directed to Bezalel. There is no difference here, for Moses receives the revelation, but the directions are for the craftsman Bezalel. The table of the Presence is one of three pieces of furniture in the Holy Place. The term *šulḥan* ("table") occurs about seventy times in the OT (eighteen times in Exodus). It is made of acacia wood overlaid with gold on which twelve loaves of bread are placed. The table with its bread presented two sides of the same truth: a divine side and a human side. First, it stands before God, reminding Israel that they are ever open to the all-seeing eye and protection of God. But this is also the place where the priests serve and find their bread. That bread points to him who is that Bread that will come down from heaven and give to men and women that everlasting bread (cf. Jn 6).

The "table" (v.23) measures three feet long by one and a half feet wide by twenty-seven inches high. The table taken from the second temple by Antiochus Epiphanes is depicted on the Arch of Titus among the items the Romans took back to Rome in AD 70. (See its description in Josephus, *Ant.* 3.139 – 41 [6.6].) The description of the table is similar to the ark, overlaid with gold (v.24), with a molding or encircling rim (v.25) and four gold rings (v.26) to hold the transporting poles (vv.27 – 28).

29 "Its plates and dishes . . . its pitchers and bowls" are not for the purpose of serving God food, as in pagan temples. After all, the sacrifices set apart for God are not to be boiled or roasted; rather, they are to come up before him in vapors and odors, not in substance or as food. Of course, some of the offerings are to be shared with the priests, and the fellowship offerings are to be shared in part with the people.

30 "The bread of the Presence [lit., 'faces']" is referred to here and in 1 Sam uel 21:6; 1 Kings 7:48; 2 Chronicles 4:19. This phrase (KJV "shew-bread") stands for the divine person, just as the "angel of his presence" (lit., "face[s]") in Isaiah 63:9, or in Exodus 33:14 – 15, "my Presence [lit., 'my face'] shall go with you," is an OT designation of Christ. The twelve loaves symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel as constantly being under the scrutiny, care, and preservation of God (cf. Jn 6:32 – 38). Just as that bread supplied the needs of priests on the

Sabbath in the Holy Place (see Lev 24:5 – 9), so Jesus meets the needs of his children in this generation (Jn 6:32 – 35). Thus it is the bread that is set before the "face" of Yahweh, which he gazes on and accepts, or the bread that is under his scrutiny and protection! The table is always set and arranged in keeping with the royal dignity Yahweh deserves.

NOTES

25 The table on the Arch of Titus shows on two sides cross-stays that brace the legs about halfway up from the bottom of the legs to the table top. These cross-stays may be what is meant by מִסְגֶּרֶת (*misgeret*, "rim" or "frame").

29 The shape of many of the utensils mentioned here has had light thrown on them by modern archaeological excavations (see K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 279 – 80).

4. Golden Lampstand (25:31 - 40)

OVERVIEW

The third article in the Holy Place is the golden lampstand. The continuing use of the "lampstand" can be found in Zechariah 4 and Revelation 1:12, 20. Central to the teaching of the tabernacle is the One who is the Light of the world. Thus where God dwells, there is light.

> 31"Make a lampstand of pure gold and hammer it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms shall be of one piece with it. 32Six branches are to extend from the sides of the lampstand — three on one side and three on the other. 33Three cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms are to be on one branch, three on the next branch, and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. 34And on the lampstand there are to be four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds

and blossoms. 35One bud shall be under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair — six branches in all. 36The buds and branches shall all be of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.

37"Then make its seven lamps and set them up on it so that they light the space in front of it. 38Its wick trimmers and trays are to be of pure gold. 39A talent of pure gold is to be used for the lampstand and all these accessories. 40See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.

COMMENTARY

31 "A lampstand [*mᵉnōrâ*, 'menorah,' appears forty-one times in the OT, twenty of which are in Exodus] of pure gold" is to be fashioned all in one piece. It is placed on the south or left side of the Holy Place. The word "candlestick" (KJV, going back to the LatinVulgate's *candelabrum*, but the LXX *lychnia*, "lampstand") is anachronistic since candles were not invented until Roman times.

The lampstand's design —"flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms"— was patterned after an almond tree (v.33), the first tree of spring in the Near East, awakening as early as mid-December and decking itself in radiant white blossoms before leafing. The triad of its parts cannot be identified with final certainty. The "cups" are either the calyx (outer covering of the flower; cf. the same word translated "cup" in Ge 44:2) or the almond nut, whose medical and cosmetic properties are described as perfect. The "bud" (so the Vulgate, LXX) is also rendered as the knop or bulb, the round object on the branch (same word as the capitals or chapters on the pillars in Solomon's temple in 1Ki 7:18). The "blossoms" of the almond tree render the same word as in Numbers 17:8, reported in connection with the budding and blossoming of Aaron's almond rod.

The expression "hammer it out" (*miqšâ*) is difficult. Josephus (*Ant.* 3.144 [6.6]) claims it was "cast gold [and] hollow," made in a mold. The verb is used of fashioning the cherubim (v.18), the lamp-stand (vv.31, 36; 37:17, 22; Nu 8:4), and the two silver trumpets (Nu 10:2). A. R. S. Kennedy (*HBD*, s.v. "Tabernacle") thinks this is *repousse* or ornamentation on the reverse side, to get

the design, while Unger (*UBD*, 1043) thinks it was hammered into sheets first. The verbal root means only “to be hard.” The Greek word merely renders it “golden-turned work.”

32 – 36 The total number of ornaments — i.e.,“six branches . . . three cups . . . on the lampstand . . . four cups . . . one bud,” etc.— is sixty-nine (6 branches x 3 sets x 3 figures + 1 branch x 4 sets x 3 figures + 3 buds under each set of branches = 69). Josephus (*Ant.* 3.145 [6.7]) added one to make the number an even seventy; the lampstand on the Arch of Titus has forty-two ornaments, while the Talmud (*Menah*. 28b) has only thirty.

37 – 39 The ancient lamp was a kind of small, round (clay) saucer with the rim pinched together to form a spout, from which protruded the top of the wick dipped in the oil of the saucer. Examples of seven-pinched rim lamps come from the age of Moses (Late Bronze). Bethshan and Meggiddo have supplied examples of metal pedestals designed to carry a lamp, consisting of an upright, three-foot-long shaft dividing into three feet and joined in a ring to be placed on the ground on top of which is a ledge for the lamp. “A talent of pure gold” (v.39) is about seventy-five pounds.

40 “According to the pattern” is once again a key word warning Moses and all subsequent readers that what he is really building is only a model, not the real abode of God, or the archetype, which lies behind the model. Therefore, it is “only a shadow of the good things that are coming — not the realities themselves” (Heb 10:1).Thus there was a built-in obsolescence in this revelation and the models exhibited in the whole tabernacle and its service as contained in Exodus 25 – Leviticus 9. The archetype remains with God, while these earthly models merely picture what is yet to come.

NOTE

31 The Arch of Titus depiction of the seven-branched menorah is still the standard for this piece of tabernacle furniture. See E. Goodenough, “The Menorah among the Jews of the Roman World,” *HUCA* 23 (1950 – 51): 449 – 92. The word גְּבִעֶיהָ (*g*ᵉ*bi*ᵗ*eyhā*,' “its flowerlike cups”) is the plural of the word for “cup” used in Genesis 44:2, 12, 16; כַּפְתֹּרֶיהָ (*kaptōreyhā*, “its buds”) is also used in Amos

9:1 and Zephaniah 2:14, but there it is translated “columns” or “pillars.”

5. Curtains, Framework,Veil, and Screen (26:1 – 37)

a.The tabernacle itself and its curtains (26:1 – 14) Overview

OVERVIEW

In 25:8, God announced that he wanted to dwell in the midst of Israel; now he gives Moses the instructions on the construction, arrangement, and furnishings of that tabernacle. The contents of this chapter can be analyzed as follows (a division that closely resembles that of the Hebrew Masoretic tradition as well):

The tabernacle itself	26:1 – 6
The roof and cover	26:7 – 14
The walls	26:15 – 30
The arrangement and furnishings	26:31 – 37

There were two sets of coverings and two sets of curtains. The outer coverings were made from the hides of sea cows and an inner covering of rams’ skins dyed red. The two sets of curtains were an outer set of goats’ hair and an inner set of fine linen, with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn. Notice again that the text moves from the inside to the outside because this is God’s order. We approach the sanctuary from the outside, but our Lord plans from within the sanctuary.

Within the sanctuary, moving from the inside out, the curtains of fine linen were visible only to the priests who served in the presence of the One who is himself righteous purity. The curtains of goats’ hair were reminders of the daily sin offering, which was a goat’s kid (Nu 28:15), and of our cleansing from sin (Lev 16). The covering of rams’ skins also recalls the sacrifice used in consecrating the priesthood (Lev 8); and it was deliberately dyed red, showing that the priesthood was set apart by blood. Finally, the protective coating of the sea cows’ hides marked a protective separation between the dwelling place of

God and the world.

[1]"Make the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue,
purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled
craftsman. [2]All the curtains are to be the same size — twenty-eight cubits
long and four cubits wide. [3]Join five of the curtains together, and do the
same with the other five. [4]Make loops of blue material along the edge of the
end curtain in one set, and do the same with the end curtain in the other set.
[5]Make fifty loops on one curtain and fi ftyloops on the end curtain of the
other set, with the loops opposite each other. [6]Then make fifty gold clasps
and use them to fasten the curtains together so that the tabernacle is a unit.

[7]"Make curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle — eleven
altogether. [8]All eleven curtains are to be the same size — thirty cubits long
and four cubits wide. [9]Join five of the curtains together into one set and the
other six into another set. Fold the sixth curtain double at the front of the
tent. [10]Make fifty loops along the edge of the end curtain in one set and also
along the edge of the end curtain in the other set. [11]Then make fifty bronze
clasps and put them in the loops to fasten the tent together as a unit. [12]As
for the additional length of the tent curtains, the half curtain that is left over
is to hang down at the rear of the tabernacle. [13]The tent curtains will be a
cubit longer on both sides; what is left will hang over the sides of the
tabernacle so as to cover it. [14]Make for the tent a covering of ram skins
dyed red, and over that a covering of hides of sea cows.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 On "linen," see comment on 25:4. Each of the "ten curtains of finely twisted linen" was about forty-two feet long and six feet wide (v.2 mg.). They were sewn together in two sets of five (v.3). Notice that the curtains were more important than the tabernacle's frame, for they are described first, thus setting up the same priority we saw in the ordering of the description of all the tabernacle's parts. The sacred space must remain inviolate; the other objects mentioned in a secondary position were ancillary to this main concern of God.

4 – 6 After stitching each five-sectioned curtain together, two curtains were coupled together by fifty loops on each side (vv.4 – 5), then joined by fifty

golden clasps or hooks (v.6; cf. v.11). The beauty of these white, fine linen curtains with blue, purple, and scarlet yarn (see comment on 25:4) was enhanced with embroidered cherubim (see comment on 25:18).

7 – 13 Of the eleven "curtains of goat hair" (vv.7 – 8), six were sewed in one portion and five in another (v.9), and again the fifty loops on one side were joined to the fifty loops on the other by fifty clasps (vv.10 – 11). Goats' hair in the Eastern world is black, not white (cf. Songs 1:5; comment on 25:4). Since the "tent curtains" (vv.12 – 13) were larger than the curtains of the tabernacle (vv.1 – 6), there would be material left on the end and on either side to "hang down the rear" (v.12) and to "hang over the sides of the tabernacle so as to cover it" (v.13).

14 On the "ram skins dyed red," the first of the two outer coverings placed over the two inner coverings of linen and goats' hair, and the "covering of hides of sea cows," see comment on 25:5.

b. The walls, or the tabernacle's framework (26:15 – 30)

[15]"Make upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. [16]Each frame is to be ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide, [17]with two projections set parallel to each other. Make all the frames of the tabernacle in this way. [18]Make twenty frames for the south side of the tabernacle [19]and make forty silver bases to go under them — two bases for each frame, one under each projection. [20]For the other side, the north side of the tabernacle, make twenty frames [21]and forty silver bases — two under each frame. [22]Make six frames for the far end, that is, the west end of the tabernacle, [23]and make two frames for the corners at the far end. [24]At these two corners they must be double from the bottom all the way to the top, and fitted into a single ring; both shall be like that. [25]So there will be eight frames and sixteen silver bases — two under each frame.

[26]"Also make crossbars of acacia wood: five for the frames on one side of the tabernacle, [27]five for those on the other side, and five for the frames on the west, at the far end of the tabernacle. [28]The center crossbar is to extend from end to end at the middle of the frames. [29]Overlay the frames

with gold and make gold rings to hold the crossbars. Also overlay the crossbars with gold.

30"Set up the tabernacle according to the plan shown you on the mountain.

COMMENTARY

15 – 25 On "acacia wood," see comment on 25:5. The command to "make upright frames" (v.15; cf. vv.19, 26) introduces the three elements that made up the "walls." The traditional rendering ("boards") has led many to the idea that the walls were solid; but if this were so, it would have obscured the inner linen curtains from sight (Kennedy, *HBD*,"Tabernacle," 4:660; the LXX translates *qĕrāšîm* as *stylous*, "pillars"). These frames formed a trellis-like structure over which the four curtains were draped.

Each frame was to be fifteen feet long by two and a quarter feet wide (v.16 mg.). The framework of the tabernacle consisted of twenty boards each on the north and south sides (vv.18 – 20), with six on the western end and a post at each of the two corners (vv.22 – 23). The "two projections" (lit., "hands") are probably the two tenons at the bottom of each frame to be inserted into the bases. The frames were fitted into a foundation of "forty silver bases" (v.19) or sockets on each side. Israel contributed one hundred talents of silver for these bases (38:25 – 28), described as atonement money (30:11 – 16). Thus the foundation of the tabernacle rested on a ransom or redemption, just as the church has been "bought with his own blood" (Ac 20:28).

The Hebrew word for "corner" (*miqṣôaʿ*) apparently means "angle." Thus one frame was cut down the center on a miter, and the two pieces formed the "corner" or "angle" frame on the two sides of the corner.

26 – 29 Fifteen "crossbars" (v.26) were to be fitted on the outside of the structure to strengthen the trellis framework: five on each of the two sides (north and south) and five on the back (west). One of the five was full length down the middle of the wall (v.28), the other four extended only half the length of the wall, making three rows of bars on the outside of the frame. The "gold rings" (v.29) were to serve as holders (lit., "houses") for the bars (cf. 25:26 – 27).

30 Once more we are reminded of the typological nature of this material, for all was to be done "according to plan" (cf. comment on 25:40; cf. also 25:9; 27:8; Ac 7:44). Hebrews 8:5 comments that since the tabernacle was intended to be a "copy and shadow of what is in heaven . . . Moses was warned when he was about to build the tabernacle: 'See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.' "

NOTES

15 It is still open debate as to whether הַקְּרָשִׁים (*haqqᵉrāšîm*, "the frames") were open framework, allowing the design on the curtains to be seen, or solid boards (the position of Kurt Galling, *Biblisches Reallexicon* [Tulbingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1937], cols. 150ff.).

19 The שְׁתֵּי יָדוֹת (*šᵉttê yādot*, "two projections"; NIV, "each projection") may have been the two pins at the lower end of each frame that held the frame in the mortises of the bases. Kennedy (*HBD*, "Tabernacle," 4:563 – 68) takes them to be the two upright arms that formed two sides of each frame in addition to the three crossbars (see v.28).

c.The tabernacle's arrangement and veil (26:31 – 35)

[31]"Make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. [32]Hang it with gold hooks on four posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold and standing on four silver bases. [33]Hang the curtain from the clasps and place the ark of the Testimony behind the curtain. The curtain will separate the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place. [34]Put the atonement cover on the ark of the Testimony in the Most Holy Place. [35]Place the table outside the curtain on the north side of the tabernacle and put the lampstand opposite it on the south side.

COMMENTARY

31 – 35 The inner veil (NIV, “curtain,” v.31), which separated the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (v.33), was to be made of the same material and design as the inner curtain and supported on four gold-covered acacia-wood pillars (v.32). The “veil” is called the “veil of covering” or “shielding curtain” in 39:34; 40:21 (cf. Nu 4:5), or the “curtain [or ‘veil’] that is in front of the Testimony” (Exod 27:21). Some say the word “curtain” comes from an unattested verb meaning “to break” or “to separate.” At the death of Christ, this inner curtain of the temple was torn in two, thereby giving the believer permanent access to the presence of God (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45; Heb 6:19; 9:3; 10:19 – 22).

d. The tabernacle’s screen (26:36 – 37)

36 “For the entrance to the tent make a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet
yarn and finely twisted linen — the work of an embroiderer. 37 Make gold
hooks for this curtain and five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold. And
cast five bronze bases for them.

COMMENTARY

36 “The entrance . . . curtain” was like the curtain dividing the two inner rooms (v.33) of the tabernacle and the inner curtain of v.1. The same Hebrew word (*māsāk*, “screen, curtain”) is used for the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard (27:16) and the screen for the entrance to the tent (here).

37 Since this curtain went to the outside and to the corners of the wall, it had “five posts of acacia wood overlaid with gold” instead of just four (v.32). Moses instructs: “Cast five copper/bronze bases” for the sockets of the pillars at the entrance. Once again, the difference in the degree of holiness is seen, not only between the Most Holy Place and the Holy Place, but here between the sockets of silver used for the sockets of the tabernacle itself and the sockets of bronze used for the entrance to the tent, just as the clasps of the cover were made of bronze (26:11; 36:18) and not of gold, as were those of the inner tent. Gold predominates in the Most Holy Place and in the Holy Place.

6. Altar of Burnt Offering (27:1 – 8)

OVERVIEW

The first and largest piece of equipment a worshiper met on entering the tabernacle court was the bronze altar. On it sacrifices were to be burned to meet and satisfy the claims of a holy God. Its position just inside the gate made it easily accessible, unavoidable, and unmistakable.

> [1]"Build an altar of acacia wood, three cubits high; it is to be square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. [2]Make a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar are of one piece, and overlay the altar with bronze. [3]Make all its utensils of bronze — its pots to remove the ashes, and its shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. [4]Make a grating for it, a bronze network, and make a bronze ring at each of the four corners of the network. [5]Put it under the ledge of the altar so that it is halfway up the altar. [6]Make poles of acacia wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. [7]The poles are to be inserted into the rings so they will be on two sides of the altar when it is carried. [8]Make the altar hollow, out of boards. It is to be made just as you were shown on the mountain.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 The "altar" (v.1) is called the altar of burnt offering in Leviticus 4:7, 10, 18. It was made of acacia wood (see comment on 25:5) and measured seven and one-half feet square by four and one-half feet high. It was overlaid with bronze (v.2). There was but one altar just as there is but one way of salvation, which Jesus fulfills (see Jn 1:29; Heb 9:13 – 14, 22 – 28).The "horns," i.e., "a horn at each of the four corners," were projections of the four corner posts but of one piece with the altar. They symbolized power, help, and sanctuary (cf. 1Sa 2:1, 10; 2Sa 22:3; 1Ki 1:50; 2:28; Pss 89:17; 112:9). The reason the horns symbolized the atoning power of the altar is that in the atonement ritual some of the blood was put on the horns before the rest was poured out at the base of the

altar (29:12; Lev 4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 8:15; 9:9; 16:18).

3 The “pots” (or pans) were to hold the fat-soaked ashes when they were removed from the hearth by the “shovels.”The “sprinkling bowls” (or basins) were to catch the blood of the animals slain beside the altar to be sprinkled on the altar’s base later on. The “meat forks” (flesh hooks) are three-pronged forks for arranging the sacrifice or retracting the priests’ portion (1Sa 2:13). The “fire pans” (or possibly “censers”) are probably for carrying fire from the altar of incense inside the Holy Place (Lev 10:1; 16:12; 1Ki 7:50).

4 – 8 A “grating” was placed midway between the top and bottom of the boxlike structure. This grating divided the altar into a lower and an upper part, a division necessitated by the sprinkling of the blood. Since any fire built inside the upper half would eventually destroy the altar from the intense heat, most conjecture that the altar box was designed to be filled with earth when in use, though the text does not mention this. Perhaps this is why it was “hollow” (v.8).

“A bronze ring at each of the four corners” (v.4) was attached to the bronze grating through which the acacia wood staves (v.6) were placed when the altar had to be moved (v.7). The “ledge” (v.5) was a projection or a collar around the altar halfway up its side.

7. Court of the Tabernacle (27:9 – 19)

[9]“Make a courtyard for the tabernacle. The south side shall be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains of finely twisted linen, [10]with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. [11]The north side shall also be a hundred cubits long and is to have curtains, with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases and with silver hooks and bands on the posts.

[12]“The west end of the courtyard shall be fifty cubits wide and have curtains, with ten posts and ten bases. [13]On the east end, toward the sunrise, the courtyard shall also be fifty cubits wide. [14]Curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on one side of the entrance, with three posts and three bases, [15]and curtains fifteen cubits long are to be on the other side, with three posts and

three bases.

16"For the entrance to the courtyard, provide a curtain twenty cubits long, of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen — the work of an embroiderer — with four posts and four bases. 17All the posts around the courtyard are to have silver bands and hooks, and bronze bases. 18The courtyard shall be a hundred cubits long and fifty cubits wide, with curtains of finely twisted linen five cubits high, and with bronze bases. 19All the other articles used in the service of the tabernacle, whatever their function, including all the tent pegs for it and those for the courtyard, are to be of bronze.

COMMENTARY

9 – 11 The "courtyard for the tabernacle" was a perfect oblong, twice as long as its breadth: 150 feet long by 75 feet wide (vv.9, 12, 13, 18 mg.). Its purposes were fourfold: (1) it was a barrier that prevented unlawful approach; (2) it protected the tent by keeping out wild animals; (3) it was a positive line of demarcation between the world and the holy presence of God; and (4) with its single gate, it was a way of approach to God.

The courtyard was to be shielded by a curtain made of the same fabric and colors (v.16) as the entrance, dividing, and inner curtains of the tabernacle (26:31 – 33, 36 – 37). It was to be high enough (7.5 feet, v.18) to block the view of all persons. Each long side was to have "twenty posts and twenty bronze bases" (vv.10 – 11). In all there were to be sixty posts (or fifty-six if the corner posts are counted twice as belonging to each side from an observer's point of view). The posts were spaced seven and one-half feet apart, with a frame or rod going through the top of the silver capitals or "bands" (v.17) providing a frame or guy rod to give stability to the posts. They were also anchored by guy ropes and pegs.

12 – 19 The courtyard was divided in half. The tabernacle occupied the central position in the western half, and the altar and laver were probably somewhat centered in the eastern half (vv.12 – 13; see *NIV Study Bible*, 124). The entrance was invitingly wide; "curtains fifteen cubits long" flanked the entrance, which was twenty cubits (about thirty feet) wide (vv.14 – 16; cf. 26:36 – 37). The

entrance, too, marked a division between the world and the dwelling place of God. All the poles surrounding the courtyard had silver fillets or "bands" (v.17) —narrow strips of binding metal used as decoration (so Childs, 526) and not as connecting rods.

8. Priesthood (27:20 – 28:5)

> [20]"Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning. [21]In the Tent of Meeting, outside the curtain that is in front of the Testimony, Aaron and his sons are to keep the lamps burning before the LORD from evening till morning. This is to be a lasting ordinance among the Israelites for the generations to come.
>
> [28:1]"Have Aaron your brother brought to you from among the Israelites, along with his sons Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, so they may serve me as priests. [2]Make sacred garments for your brother Aaron, to give him dignity and honor. [3]Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so he may serve me as priest. [4]These are the garments they are to make: a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a woven tunic, a turban and a sash. They are to make these sacred garments for your brother Aaron and his sons, so they may serve me as priests. [5]Have them use gold, and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and fine linen.

COMMENTARY

20 – 21 Only Aaron and his four sons were to serve as priests in standing before God. The priest was the indispensable mediator in the life of fellowship with God.

The "clear oil of pressed olives" (v.20) was extracted from unripe olives beaten and pounded in a mortar rather than crushed. The pulpy mass was then placed in a basket through which only the oil dripped, producing a clear, pure oil that burned with little or no smoke. The lamps were to be kept burning "from evening till morning" (cf. 30:8; 1Sa 3:3). Significantly, the people were to

provide this oil continuously; otherwise there would be darkness in the dwelling place of God.

28:1 "Nadab and Abihu," two of Aaron's four sons, later offered unauthorized fire before the Lord and were consumed (Lev 10:1 – 2), leaving only Eleazer and Ithamar. Aaron and his sons were to "serve . . . as priests." They were to stand before the Lord (applied to *all* Levites in Dt 10:8) "to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins" and "to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray" (Heb 5:1 – 2).They must teach the people (Ne 8:2, 9) and serve as intercessors for them.

2 – 5 The garments of the high priest "give him dignity and honor" (v.2), i.e., they exalt the office and function of the high priest as well as beautify the worship of God. "The skilled men" (v.3) are to make priestly garments for Aaron. Eight garments are mentioned: the four inner garments worn by all priests — tunics, linen undergarments or breeches, girdles or sashes, and headbands (vv.39 – 42). The four special overgarments to be worn by Aaron are the breastpiece, ephod, robe, and turban (mitre; v.4).

NOTES

21 Some view the word וּבָנָיו (*ûbānāyw*, "and his sons") as a gloss since they are not present in Leviticus 24:1 – 4. However, Levine (311 – 12) retains the reading, noting this same phenomenon in several comparisons between Exodus and Leviticus.

28:2 בִּגְדֵי־קֹדֶשׁ (*bigdê-qōdeš*, "holy/sacred garments") shows that the priests had some type of dress distinguishable from the laity, thereby indicating that their task and mission set them apart to the Lord. It also indicated that they served a holy King (cf. comment on 3:5 – 6).

9. Garments of the Priests (28:6 – 43)

6"Make the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely

twisted linen — the work of a skilled craftsman. [7]It is to have two shoulder pieces attached to two of its corners, so it can be fastened. [8]Its skillfully woven waistband is to be like it — of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen.

[9]"Take two onyx stones and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel [10]in the order of their birth — six names on one stone and the remaining six on the other. [11]Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones the way a gem cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in gold filigree settings [12]and fasten them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel. Aaron is to bear the names on his shoulders as a memorial before the LORD. [13]Make gold filigree settings [14]and two braided chains of pure gold, like a rope, and attach the chains to the settings.

[15]"Fashion a breastpiece for making decisions — the work of a skilled craftsman. Make it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. [16]It is to be square — a span long and a span wide — and folded double. [17]Then mount four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there shall be a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; [18]in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; [19]in the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; [20]in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. Mount them in gold filigree settings. [21]There are to be twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.

[22]"For the breastpiece make braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. [23]Make two gold rings for it and fasten them to two corners of the breastpiece. [24]Fasten the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, [25]and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. [26]Make two gold rings and attach them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. [27]Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam just above the waistband of the ephod. [28]The rings of the breastpiece are to be tied to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the breastpiece will not swing out from the ephod.

[29]"Whenever Aaron enters the Holy Place, he will bear the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the breastpiece of decision as a continuing

memorial before the LORD. [30]Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the LORD.

[31]"Make the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth, [32]with an opening for the head in its center. There shall be a woven edge like a collar around this opening, so that it will not tear. [33]Make pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn around the hem of the robe, with gold bells between them. [34]The gold bells and the pomegranates are to alternate around the hem of the robe. [35]Aaron must wear it when he ministers. The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die.

[36]"Make a plate of pure gold and engrave on it as on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. [37]Fasten a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban; it is to be on the front of the turban. [38]It will be on Aaron's forehead, and he will bear the guilt involved in the sacred gifts the Israelites consecrate, whatever their gifts may be. It will be on Aaron's forehead continually so that they will be acceptable to the LORD.

[39]"Weave the tunic of fi ne linen and make the turban of fi ne linen. The sash is to be the work of an embroiderer. [40]Make tunics, sashes and headbands for Aaron's sons, to give them dignity and honor. [41]After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests.

[42]"Make linen undergarments as a covering for the body, reaching from the waist to the thigh. [43]Aaron and his sons must wear them whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting or approach the altar to minister in the Holy Place, so that they will not incur guilt and die.

"This is to be a lasting ordinance for Aaron and his descendants.

COMMENTARY

6 – 14 The ephod probably was a high priestly waistcoat woven of blue, purple, scarlet, and white linen thread — all entwined with gold thread. Instead of having sleeves or being joined at the sides, it was hung from the shoulders by straps on each of which one onyx stone was mounted on top of a golden clasp, with the names of the six younger sons of Israel engraved on one stone and the

six elder sons engraved on the other stone (vv.9 – 10). The LXX makes the onyx "emeralds," while Josephus (*Ant.* 3.165 [7.5]) makes them "sardonyx," the best variety of onyx. The names symbolize that the high priest represented all Israel when he ministered in the tabernacle (v.12). A "waistband" (v.8) made of the same material and style as the ephod held the front and back of the ephod to the priest's body. It had no significance of its own.

15 – 30 The "breastpiece" (v.15), a square piece of cloth made the same way as the ephod, was folded in half upward to form a sort of pouch in a nine-by-nine-inch square (v.16). Two rings at the inside lower corners attached the breastpiece to the rings of the ephod with a blue cord (v.28). Two golden rings on the top of the breastpiece fastened it to the shoulder pieces of the ephod with two golden chains (vv.22 – 28). Twelve stones, one for each tribe, were set in four rows of three stones; the name of each son of Jacob was engraved on its respective stone in the sons' chronological order of birth (vv.17 – 21). Thus the nation was doubly represented before the Lord (v.29; on the identity of the stones, see A. Paul Davis and E. L. Gilmore, *Lapidary Journal* [Dec 1968]: 1124 – 28; 1130 – 34). The stones remind us of the value God sets on each individual made in his image and particularly on the sons of Israel.

The "Urim and the Thummim" (v.30; lit., "lights and perfections") were used in times of crisis to determine God's will (Nu 27:21), but just how they functioned and what they looked like is unknown. Perhaps they only symbolized the special revelation open to the high priest rather than being the necessary means of receiving that revelation (see also Lev 8:8; Nu 27:21; Dt 33:8; 1Sa 28:6; Ezr 2:63; Ne 7:65).

31 – 35 Under the ephod was a long, sleeveless blue "robe," woven without a seam (v.31), which reached a little below the knees. It had slits for the arms and a hole for the head to pass through (v.32). Along the hem were blue, purple, and scarlet a lternating pomegranates and golden bells (vv.33 – 34). The bells, which jingled as the high priest served in the tabernacle, assured all who listened that he had not died in the Holy Place and that he continued to minister on their behalf (v.35).

36 – 39 The most conspicuous and important feature of the "turban" (mitre) was the golden plate with the engraving, "HOLY TO THE LORD" (v.36). The

golden plate stretched over the forehead from ear to ear and was attached with a blue band going through two holes at the ends of the plate and then over the top of the head to a hole in the center of the golden plate (vv.37 – 38). The "tunic of fine linen" (v.39) no doubt refers to a long white linen coat worn over the linen drawers or breeches (v.42), which, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 3.153 – 5 [7.2]), reached down to the ankles and was close-fitted to the body as were the sleeves.

40 – 43 The attire for the ordinary priests is described next. Its purpose is to give "dignity and honor" (lit., "glory and beauty"; v.40) to them in their office. Verse 41 forms a transition to ch. 29, which speaks of the ordination of the priests. On the linen garments (vv.42 – 43), see comment on 20:26.

NOTES

6 The אֵפֹד (ʾēpōd, "ephod") has various meanings in the OT. Sometimes it was a garment such as Samuel (1Sa 2:18) and David (2Sa 6:14) wore. Elsewhere it was a solid object, such as an image of a god (Jdg 8:27; 17:5; 18:14 – 17); at other times it was an object used to inquire of the Lord (1Sa 14:3, 18 – 19[cf. LXX], 36 – 42).This later usage may reflect the ephod's association with the Urim and Thummim. It may also be that ʾēpōd is used to describe two different objects or that it is a garment also placed on an idol as well as worn by a priest. Some view the garment as a waistcoat and others as an apron or a garment worn over the lower part of the body.

7 Concerning the "two shoulder pieces," Hyatt, 282, points to a sixth-dynasty Egyptian tomb inscription that shows male dancers with two shoulder pieces holding up a loincloth-like garment (Pritchard, *ANEP*, 210).

10. Ordination of the Priests (29:1 – 46)

OVERVIEW

The instructions given in 28:41 are here elaborated in greater detail and are implemented in Leviticus 8. The consecration of Aaron and his sons in an act of ordination stresses the seriousness and central mission they have been given in the worship of our holy God.

[1]“This is what you are to do to consecrate them, so they may serve me as priests: Take a young bull and two rams without defect. [2]And from fi ne wheat fl our, without yeast, make bread, and cakes mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil. [3]Put them in a basket and present them in it — along with the bull and the two rams. [4]Then bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water. [5]Take the garments and dress Aaron with the tunic, the robe of the ephod, the ephod itself and the breastpiece. Fasten the ephod on him by its skillfully woven waistband. [6]Put the turban on his head and attach the sacred diadem to the turban. [7]Take the anointing oil and anoint him by pouring it on his head. [8]Bring his sons and dress them in tunics [9]and put headbands on them. Then tie sashes on Aaron and his sons. The priesthood is theirs by a lasting ordinance. In this way you shall ordain Aaron and his sons.

[10]“Bring the bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. [11]Slaughter it in the LORD’s presence at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. [12]Take some of the bull’s blood and put it on the horns of the altar with your finger, and pour out the rest of it at the base of the altar. [13]Then take all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys with the fat on them, and burn them on the altar. [14]But burn the bull’s flesh and its hide and its offal outside the camp. It is a sin offering.

[15]“Take one of the rams, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. [16]Slaughter it and take the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides. [17]Cut the ram into pieces and wash the inner parts and the legs, putting them with the head and the other pieces. [18]Then burn the entire ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fi re.

[19]“Take the other ram, and Aaron and his sons shall lay their hands on its head. [20]Slaughter it, take some of its blood and put it on the lobes of the right ears of Aaron and his sons, on the thumbs of their right hands, and on the big toes of their right feet. Then sprinkle blood against the altar on all

sides. [21]And take some of the blood on the altar and some of the anointing oil and sprinkle it on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and their garments. Then he and his sons and their garments will be consecrated.

[22]“Take from this ram the fat, the fat tail, the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys with the fat on them, and the right thigh. (This is the ram for the ordination.) [23]From the basket of bread made without yeast, which is before the LORD, take a loaf, and a cake made with oil, and a wafer. [24]Put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. [25]Then take them from their hands and burn them on the altar along with the burnt offering for a pleasing aroma to the LORD, an offering made to the LORD by fire. [26]After you take the breast of the ram for Aaron’s ordination, wave it before the LORD as a wave offering, and it will be your share.

[27]“Consecrate those parts of the ordination ram that belong to Aaron and his sons: the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. [28]This is always to be the regular share from the Israelites for Aaron and his sons. It is the contribution the Israelites are to make to the LORD from their fellowship offerings.

[29]“Aaron’s sacred garments will belong to his descendants so that they can be anointed and ordained in them. [30]The son who succeeds him as priest and comes to the Tent of Meeting to minister in the Holy Place is to wear them seven days.

[31]“Take the ram for the ordination and cook the meat in a sacred place. [32]At the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, Aaron and his sons are to eat the meat of the ram and the bread that is in the basket. [33]They are to eat these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration. But no one else may eat them, because they are sacred. [34]And if any of the meat of the ordination ram or any bread is left over till morning, burn it up. It must not be eaten, because it is sacred.

[35]“Do for Aaron and his sons everything I have commanded you, taking seven days to ordain them. [36]Sacrifice a bull each day as a sin offering to make atonement. Purify the altar by making atonement for it, and anoint it to consecrate it. [37]For seven days make atonement for the altar and consecrate it. Then the altar will be most holy, and whatever touches it will be holy.

[38]“This is what you are to offer on the altar regularly each day: two

lambs a year old. [39]Offer one in the morning and the other at twilight. [40]With the first lamb offer a tenth of an ephah of fine fl our mixed with a quarter of a hin of oil from pressed olives, and a quarter of a hin of wine as a drink offering. [41]Sacrifice the other lamb at twilight with the same grain offering and its drink offering as in the morning — a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire.

[42]"For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet you and speak to you; [43]there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory.

[44]"So I will consecrate the Tent of Meeting and the altar and will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve me as priests. [45]Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God. [46]They will know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of Egypt so that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God.

COMMENTARY

1 – 9 Aaron and his sons are installed as high priest and ministering priests, respectively. This service of consecration uniquely marks them for the ser vice of the tabernacle. The sacrifices for this occasion must be "without defect" (v.1; cf. comment on 12:5). Similarly, the consecrating sacrifice must be "without yeast" (v.2; cf. comment on 12:15). Then Aaron and his sons are to be washed (v.4).The investiture of the high priest involves nine acts (Lev 8:7 – 9), but for ordinary priests it involves only three (vv.8 – 9). Washing with water symbolizes the removal of uncleanness resulting from sin (v.4; cf. 40:12 – 13; Lev 8:6 – 9; note Heb 10:22).

Aaron and his sons are next dressed in the clothes described in ch. 28 and then anointed. The manner in which Aaron, the high priest, is anointed is different from that of his sons (v.7; cf. v.21; cf. also Lev 21:10). For the composition of the anointing oil, see 30:22 – 25. Notice the connection of the verb *māšaḥ* ("anoint") with the noun *māšaḥ* ("anointed one," viz., "Messiah"; cf. *TWOT* no. 1255).

10 – 12 A bull is brought as a sin offering to atone for Aaron's and his sons'

past sins. They lay their hands on the bull's head, in effect transferring their sins to the sin-bearer (cf. the sin offering of Lev 4:1 – 5:13 and the clear parallel on the Day of Atonement in 16:11, 15, 21). Then the bull is slaughtered in the presence of the Lord as an act of appeasement (v.11). Applying blood to the horns of the altar and the base of the altar sanctifies the offering place as well as the offering (v.12).

13 – 14 After the sacrificial animal is killed, the choicest parts are burned on the altar, the enveloping fat adding fuel to the fire (v.13; cf. Lev 3:4 – 5, 16; 7:23 – 25). The "flesh and its hide and its offal," however, are considered permeated with sin and are thus burned outside the camp (v.14). Similarly, Christ our Sacrifice offered up his spirit to the heavenly Father, but his flesh went into the tomb, outside the "camp" (cf. Heb 13:11 – 13).

15 – 18 As with the bull, Aaron and his sons are to identify with one of the rams by laying their hands on it (v.15).This ram is completely offered to the Lord (v.18). Entire and wholehearted dedication of everything they are or hope to be to God is called for. This constitutes the "pleasing aroma" to the Lord (v.18; cf. Lev 1:9).

19 – 21 The second ram is also to be identified with, but it must be used to consecrate Aaron and his sons (v.19). After slaughtering the ram, they must "take some of its blood" and consecrate "the lobes of their [right] ears" (v.20), the organ that hears God's word. Then blood is to be applied to "the thumbs of their right hands," organs by which the mediatorial work is performed on behalf of the people. Next Aaron and his sons are to apply blood to the "big toes of their right feet," so that the sanctified walk of the priests will be examples to the people. Lastly, some of the blood of the altar must be mixed with the anointing oil and sprinkled on Aaron and his sons and their clothes (v.21). This represents the full consecration of the priests.

22 – 26 The second ram is called "the ram for the ordination" (v.22) — literally, "the ram of filling." The choice parts of this ram along with the unleavened bread, oiled cake, and wafer (v.23) are to "fill" the hands of Aaron and his sons and to be used as a "wave offering" (v.24).The waving is not from side to side but toward the altar and back, showing that the sacrifice is given to God and then received back by the priest for his use (cf. Lev 7:30; 23:20).

Everything waved except the “breast of the ram” (v.26) is then to be burned on the altar (v.25).

27 – 28 The breast of every animal that is waved and the thigh that is given as a fellowship offering are henceforth given to the priests.

29 – 30 The ordination garments of Aaron and his sons must be passed down for future ordinations (v.29).The priest who succeeds Aaron as high priest will wear these garments for seven days (v.30), perhaps to symbolize the completeness of his consecration.

31 – 34 The “ram for the ordination” (v.31; i.e., the breast and thigh, v.27) is to be cooked in a “sacred place,” viz., in the tabernacle courtyard. Then Aaron and his sons are to partake of the various foodstuffs in a type of communion meal (v.32). This is a closed communion (v.33), and all leftovers must be burned (v.34).

35 – 37 Again obedience is emphasized (v.35). The full consecration of the altar requires the sacrifice of a bull for seven days running (v.36). After seven days of consecration the altar will be “most holy,” which is explained to mean that whatever touches it will likewise be made holy (v.37; cf. Mt 23:19).

38 – 41 Next Moses receives instructions on the nature of the daily offerings (v.38). Two yearling lambs a day are to be sacrificed, one in the morning and the other at evening (v.39; cf. Nu 28:3 – 8; cf. also 2Ki 16:15; Eze 46:13 – 15, for the morning burnt offering and the evening cereal offering). The morning and the evening sacrifices are accompanied by a mixture of about two quarts of flour and one quarter of a hin of olive oil and a drink offering of a quart of wine (vv.40 – 41). Once again the Lord reminds Moses that the offering is a pleasing aroma for him.

42 – 43 The Lord gives Moses a prophetic glimpse into Israel’s future by referring to the obligation “for the generations to come” (v.42). He promises to meet with the priests and Israel as regularly as the sacrifices are made. The Hebrew for “the place will be consecrated” (v.43) is literally, “it will be consecrated.” This may refer to the place, but it is better to assume “Israel” will be sanctified, since fellowship is based on atonement. The LXX, Syriac, and

Targums read the first person: “and I shall consecrate myself by my glory.”

44 – 46 After the Lord has consecrated the priests and paraphernalia (v.44), he “will dwell among the Israelites and be their God” (v.45). In fact, the divine side of the exodus is so that God “might dwell among” his people (v.46). The real significance of the tabernacle theology is explicitly stated as God’s “tabernacling” or “dwelling” among people so that they can recognize that he indeed is God.

NOTES

9 וּמִלֵּאתָ יַד־אַהֲרֹן (*ûmillēʾtā yad-ʾahărōn*, “in this way you shall ordain Aaron”) is literally,“so you shall fill the hand of Aaron.” The origin of the idiom is unknown, but the idea of “filling” (*milluʾîm*) came to mean “ordination.”

22 אֵיל מִלֻּאִים (*ʾêl milluʾîm*, “the ram for the ordination”) is “the ram of filling,” in this case, filling the hands with a ministry.

39 בֵּין הָעַרְבָּיִם (*bên hāʿarbāyim*, is “between the two evenings.”

11. Altar of Incense (30:1 – 10)

a. Building instructions (30:1 – 6)

OVERVIEW

The altar of incense also stood in the Holy Place. Whereas the altar inside the gate to the court was overlaid with bronze and was the place of continual bloodshed, this altar is overlaid with gold and has perpetual incense on it to symbolize continual intercession to God.

[1]“Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. [2]It is to be square, a

cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high — its horns of one piece with it. [3]Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. [4]Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding — two on opposite sides — to hold the poles used to carry it. [5]Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. 6Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony — before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony — where I will meet with you.

COMMENTARY

1 – 6 This altar must be made of "acacia wood" (v.1).This square structure with horns on each corner (v.2) is considerably smaller than the altar of burnt offering (cf. 27:1). The incense altar must be overlaid with gold (v.3), has the usual rings (v.4) for the transporting poles (v.5), and is to be located directly in front of the curtain that shields the "ark of the Testimony" from view (v.6).

NOTE

1 On the use of incense in the OT, cf. M. Haran, "The Uses of Incense in Ancient Israel Ritual," *VT* 10 (1960): 113 – 15; Nelson Glueck, "Incense Altars," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament* (eds. H. T. Frank and W. L. Reed; Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 325 – 29; and K. Galling, "Incense Altar," *IDB*, 2:699 – 700. For illustrations of such altars, see Pritchard, *ANEP* nos. 575, 579, 581, 583.

b. Operating instructions (30:7 – 10)

[7]"Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. [8]He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come. [9]Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. [10]Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be

made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the LORD."

COMMENTARY

7 – 10 The effective use of anything depends on following correct procedures. The incense that is to be burned every morning and evening symbolized the prayers of the saints and communion with God (vv.7 – 8; cf. Ps 141:2; Lk 1:10; Rev 5:8; 8:3 – 4). What must not be used on the altar of incense is pointed out (v.9). Failure to follow this will result in the desecration of the altar. Also, once a year the altar must be cleansed with blood from the atoning offering (v.10).

NOTE

10 On כִּפֶּר (*kipper*, "to make atonement"), J. Herrmann ("ἱλάσκομαι," *TDNT*, 3:310) concludes, "It would be useless to deny that the idea of substitution is present to some degree" (see also Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955], 160 – 78).

12. Census Tax (30:11 – 16)

[11]Then the LORD said to Moses, [12]"When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. [13]Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the LORD. [14]All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD. [15]The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives. [16]Receive the atonement money from the Israelites and use it for the service of the Tent of Meeting. It will be a memorial for the Israelites before the LORD, making atonement for your lives."

COMMENTARY

11 – 16 The precise reason for taking a census is not given. Perhaps it is to obtain a register of citizens for public duties in the Lord's ser vice. Previously, 13:13 stated that the firstborn son belonged to God and had to be redeemed by a sacrifice. Likewise all firstborn belonged to God, and he accepted the tribe of Levi in lieu of all the firstborn (4:22; Nu 3:12).Verse 12 extends the principle. The word for "ransom" or "atonement" (*kōper*) signifies, "to deliver or redeem by a substitute." In this case the substitute is money by taking a census. Usually a census was used for mustering troops; that is why it was so dangerous for David to take a census (2Sa 24). It is clear, however, that those numbered under the proper circumstances would be under divine protection.

The "shekel" is mentioned in 21:32. A "half shekel" (v.13) is about one-fifth of an ounce. This tax must be paid by adults of military age (v.14). The fact that the rich are to give the same amount as the poor shows that it is not how much one has that obtains atonement for his life (v.15). The proceeds from the census tax are to be used by the Levites in their service for the Lord and are also to serve as a memorial for the Israelites (v.16).

13. Bronze Basin, Anointing Oil, and Incense (30:17 – 38)

17 Then the LORD said to Moses, 18 "Make a bronze basin, with its bronze
stand, for washing. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and
put water in it. 19 Aaron and his sons are to wash their hands and feet with
water from it. 20 Whenever they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash
with water so that they will not die. Also, when they approach the altar to
minister by presenting an offering made to the LORD by fire, 21 they shall
wash their hands and feet so that they will not die. This is to be a lasting
ordinance for Aaron and his descendants for the generations to come."

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, 23 "Take the following fine spices: 500
shekels of liquid myrrh, half as much (that is, 250 shekels) of fragrant
cinnamon, 250 shekels of fragrant cane, 24 500 shekels of cassia — all
according to the sanctuary shekel — and a hin of olive oil. 25 Make these
into a sacred anointing oil, a fragrant blend, the work of a perfumer. It will

be the sacred anointing oil. [26]Then use it to anoint the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony, [27]the table and all its articles, the lampstand and its accessories, the altar of incense, [28]the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the basin with its stand. [29]You shall consecrate them so they will be most holy, and whatever touches them will be holy.

[30]"Anoint Aaron and his sons and consecrate them so they may serve me as priests. [31]Say to the Israelites, 'This is to be my sacred anointing oil for the generations to come. [32]Do not pour it on men's bodies and do not make any oil with the same formula. It is sacred, and you are to consider it sacred. [33]Whoever makes perfume like it and whoever puts it on anyone other than a priest must be cut off from his people.' "

[34]Then the LORD said to Moses,"Take fragrant spices — gum resin, onycha and galbanum — and pure frankincense, all in equal amounts, [35]and make a fragrant blend of incense, the work of a perfumer. It is to be salted and pure and sacred. [36]Grind some of it to powder and place it in front of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you. It shall be most holy to you. [37]Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the LORD. [38]Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people."

COMMENTARY

17 – 21 The "bronze basin" (v.18) was made from the bronze mirrors of the women (38:8) given as a freewill offering. Its exact shape is uncertain, but Keil and Delitzsch, 2:213, surmise that the "stand" was separate since it is always mentioned separately (cf. 31:9; 35:16; 39:39; 40:11; Lev 8:11). It was vital that the priests wash their hands and feet (v.19) whenever they entered the "Tent of Meeting" (v.20) and when they approached the altar to make an offering to the Lord. Performing service to God in the tabernacle in a state of ritual impurity risked death (vv.20 – 21; cf. Lev 10:1 – 2).

22 – 38 On the spices and anointing oils, see comment on 25:6. The anointing of the various furniture and accoutrements served to consecrate them to the Lord's service (vv.26 – 29). The "sacred anointing oil" (v.31) was to be unique in both its makeup and use. To merchandise it or duplicate it without proper

authorization would result in excommunication from the nation (vv.31 – 33).

NOTE

35 Leviticus 2:13 says that all cereal offerings were to be seasoned with salt. Numbers 18:19 and 2 Chronicles 13:5 both mention a "covenant of salt."

14. Appointment of Craftsmen (31:1 – 11)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, [2]"See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri,
the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, [3]and I have filled him with the Spirit
of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts — [4]to make
artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, [5]to cut and set stones, to
work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship. [6]Moreover, I
have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, to help him.
Also I have given skill to all the craftsmen to make everything I have
commanded you: [7]the Tent of Meeting, the ark of the Testimony with the
atonement cover on it, and all the other furnishings of the tent — [8]the table
and its articles, the pure gold lampstand and all its accessories, the altar of
incense, [9]the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, the basin with its
stand — [10]and also the woven garments, both the sacred garments for
Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests,
[11]and the anointing oil and fragrant incense for the Holy Place. They are to
make them just as I commanded you."

COMMENTARY

1 – 11 "Bezalel" (v.2) means "in the shadow of God's [protection]." He was a descendant of Caleb (1Ch 2:19), and his ability to work in the arts and his skills as a craftsman were gifts of the Holy Spirit (vv.3 – 5). "Oholiab" (v.6), Bezalel's assistant, was from the tribe of Dan. His name means "tent of the father" or "the (divine) father is my tent." These two skilled craftsmen were responsible for the construction of all that pertained to the tabernacle and its ser vice, though they

themselves possibly only supervised in the construction of the various items (vv.7 – 11).

15. Sabbath Rest (31:12 – 17)

[12]Then the LORD said to Moses, [13]"Say to the Israelites, 'You must observe my Sabbaths. This will be a sign between me and you for the generations to come, so you may know that I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

[14]" 'Observe the Sabbath, because it is holy to you. Anyone who desecrates it must be put to death; whoever does any work on that day must be cut off from his people. [15]For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, holy to the LORD. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day must be put to death. [16]The Israelites are to observe the Sabbath, celebrating it for the generations to come as a lasting covenant. [17]It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.' "

COMMENTARY

12 – 17 Even though the construction and furnishing of the tabernacle is sacred work, the workmen must not overlook the sacred institution of the Sabbath. "You must observe my Sabbaths" is emphatic (v.13). To violate the Sabbath even for the sake of working on the tabernacle will result in death (vv.14 – 15). "Desecrates" contrasts sharply with "makes you holy" in v.13. As God's covenantal people, the Israelites are to observe carefully the sign of that covenant (vv.16 – 17). The Sabbath is the sign of "a lasting covenant" (*bᵉrît ʿôlām*, "a perpetual covenant"), like the rainbow (Ge 9:16), circumcision (Ge 17:7, 13, 19), and the table of the bread of the Presence (Lev 24:8). The Sabbath is thus a gift to Israel signifying that they are a separate people.

NOTE

13 Often in the OT, אוֹת (ʾôt, “sign”; GK 253) is a miracle (4:8 – 9) or a memorial (Jos 4:6). But here it is a pledge of the covenantal relationship, as were the rainbow after the flood (Ge 9:12 – 17) and circumcision for the covenant (Ge 17:11). Here, as in Ezekiel 20:12, 20, the Sabbath is a sign of the Mosaic covenant.

16. Conclusion to the Instructions (31:18)

> [18]When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.

COMMENTARY

18 This verse is transitional to the golden calf scene. The forty days (see comment on 24:18) have come to an end. The “two tablets of the Testimony” contain the Ten Commandments (cf. 32:15 – 16; 34:28; Dt 4:13; 5:22; 10:4). On the “finger of God,” see comment on 8:19.

B. False Worship of the Golden Calf (32:1 – 34:35)

1. Golden Calf (32:1 – 29)

OVERVIEW

While chs. 32 – 34 continue the narrative interrupted after 24:18, their appearance at this point in the text deliberately contrasts the authorized worship of God set forth in the instructions for the tabernacle with the unauthorized worship of the man-made golden calf. One can hardly conceive of two greater opposites.

There is another contrast between what is taking place on the mountain and what is happening on the desert floor: the contrast of God's presence versus the insidious force of sin (cf. Dt 9:8 – 21; Ne 9:18; Ps 106:19 – 23). Therefore, chs. 32 – 34 form a terrible and ignominious interlude between the instructions on Israel's worship and their implementation.

[1]When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the
mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who
will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt,
we don't know what has happened to him."
[2]Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your
sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." [3]So all the
people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. [4]He took what
they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf,
fashioning it with a tool. Then they said,"These are your gods, O Israel,
who brought you up out of Egypt."
[5]When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and
announced,"Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD." [6]So the next
day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented
fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to
indulge in revelry.
[7]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom
you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. [8]They have been quick
to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an
idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed
to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out
of Egypt.'
[9]"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are a
stiff-necked people. [10]Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn
against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great
nation."
[11]But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said,
"why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out
of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? [12]Why should the Egyptians
say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the
mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your
fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. [13]Remember

your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: ‘I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.’” [14]Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.

[15]Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. [16]The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets.

[17]When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, “There is the sound of war in the camp.”

[18]Moses replied:

“It is not the sound of victory,
it is not the sound of defeat;
it is the sound of singing that I hear.”

[19]When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. [20]And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.

[21]He said to Aaron, “What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?”

[22]“Do not be angry, my lord,” Aaron answered. “You know how prone these people are to evil. [23]They said to me, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.’ [24]So I told them, ‘Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.’ Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”

[25]Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. [26]So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, “Whoever is for the LORD, come to me.” And all the Levites rallied to him.

[27]Then he said to them, “This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.’ ” [28]The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. [29]Then Moses said, “You have been set apart

to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

COMMENTARY

1 Without proper visible leadership, people fail. Sometimes even the holiest of men, like Aaron, can be persuaded to do things contrary to their testimony. The people's cry, "Come, make us gods who will go before us," reveals their inadequate faith in a time of waiting. The clause, "as for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt," is deliberately cast in coarse language, thus revealing the attitude of the people, who relegate God's works to those of a mere mortal. As Houtman notes (3:633), the people have clearly gained the upper hand at this point.

2 – 4 Aaron instructs the people to "take off" (*pāraq*, lit., "tear off "; contrast *lāqaḥ*, "take," in 35:5) their "gold earrings." No doubt these are part of the gifted booty brought from Egypt (see comments on 3:21 – 22; 11:2 – 3; 12:35 – 36). Aaron then casts them "in the shape of a calf" (v.4), probably by applying gold leaf over a wooden form, which can thus later be burned (v.20). Or he may have roughcast it in solid gold and then shaped it by hand. Many of the translations vary at this point because the Hebrew word *heret* is variously rendered in other texts as "stylus," "graving tool," or "chisel" (Houtman, 3:637).

The idol is a calf, i.e., a young bull, the symbol of virile power. On completion Aaron — and probably his sons — have the audacity to proclaim to Israel, "These are your gods," in direct violation of the second commandment so recently given to them. Jeroboam borrowed this statement when he installed the two golden calves at the division of the kingdom in 931 BC (1Ki 12:28).

5 Instead of "he built an altar," the Peshitta changed the vowels and read, "Then Aaron became afraid and built an altar." The idea fits the context even if it is unattested. It is as though the altar built (of field stones and earth as in 20:24 – 25) in front of the calf is to act as a sop for Aaron's conscience and the feast is billed as one to honor the true God in this syncretistic confusion. Houtman, 3:641, points to Aaron's fear as an indication that Aaron acts against his own will:

> Aaron can plead extenuating circumstances; he was no match for the pressure from the people; his life was in danger. The belief that Aaron's heart was not in it when he gave in to the people is further brought out in the exegesis: Aaron calls out "with a doleful voice" . .. after talking about "tomorrow" . .. Aaron takes the blame himself.

6 After making an attempt to honor the Lord with their offerings, the people satisfy their own desires and proceed to "indulge in revelry." The verb signifies drunken, immoral orgies and sexual play ("conjugal *ṣāḥaq* caresses," BDB, 850; cf. Ge 26:8; 39:14, 17). Houtman, 3:643, restricts the meaning to "have fun," denying the sexual allusions noted here.

7 – 10 In response to Israel's behavior, God charges Moses, "Your people whom you have brought up . . . have become corrupt" (v.7). God deliberately changes the possessive pronoun from "my" to "your," thereby indicating that he is disowning Israel (cf. "my people" in 3:10 et al.). "Have become corrupt" (*šiḥēt* from *šāḥat*; GK 8845) renders the same verb found in Genesis 6:12 for the apostasy or corruption in Noah's day. It means "to go to ruin/destruction" (cf. Dt 9:6; 10:16; Ps 75:5; Jer 17:23). The fact that they are "quick to turn away" (v.8) shows that Israel has apostatized from the truth revealed in word and events they themselves have witnessed. A "stiff-necked people" (v.9) will not bow under God's authority (cf. Jer 27:11 – 12), even though they have readily "bowed down" to the calf and worshiped it (v.8).

God is very angry with the people (v.10). The God who seems unmerciful, however, is the same God who has mercifully prepared Moses for just such an occasion as this. So God says, by way of testing Moses, "Leave me alone." But God will allow himself to be bound, as it were, by prepared persons doing prepared work in God's way.

11 – 14 In his role as divinely raised-up mediator, Moses appeals to the Lord (v.11). First he reminds the Lord of his special covenantal relationship with his people, which he manifested in the exodus. Then he appeals to God's need to keep his name holy and trustworthy (v.12). Finally, he refers to the great patriarchal promises (v.13).

As Moses champions the Lord's cause,"the LORD relents" (v.14). In only two

of the thirty-eight instances is this verb (*nḥm*) in the OT speaking of human repenting (see Reflections).

15 – 16 This is the only passage that informs us that the "two tablets of the Testimony" are inscribed "on both sides" (v.15). That the tablets are "the work of God" (v.16) emphasizes their divine origin. In 31:18 they are said to be "inscribed by the finger of God," but 34:28 says that "Moses . . . wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant — the Ten Commandments."

17 – 18 According to 24:13, Joshua ascended the mountain with Moses, perhaps halfway up. Joshua mistakes the "noise of the people shouting" for war cries (v.17). Moses, however, discerns otherwise. In all three lines of v.18 the phrase "sound of" is literally, "the sound of answering." There is a play on the word "answer" used in two senses: it is not the "shout" of the victor,with its corresponding racket of the vanquished, but the antiphonal song of singers.

19 – 20 The wickedness of the people, for whom Moses has just pled the Lord's preservation, angers Moses when he sees the calf and the dancing. Not only are the stone tablets broken, symbolizing the breaking of God's covenant by the people, but Moses quickly breaks up the calf and the festivities, bringing an end to the people's covenant with carnality. Moses takes the calf and burns it, grinds it to powder, and "scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it" (v.20) — a fitting conclusion for a shameful act. Jeroboam's altar at Bethel suffered a similar fate (2Ki 23:15).

22 – 24 Aaron must do some quick thinking to extricate himself from guilt as an accomplice in the people's reveling. He tries four excuses: (1) "you know how prone these people are to evil" (v.22); (2) "they said to me . . ." (v.23); (3) "we don't know what has happened to [Moses]." The flimsiest excuse comes last: (4) "out came this calf!" (v.24). Is Aaron trying to say that a miracle occurred?

25 – 26 The people have cast off all restraint; "they were running wild and . . . out of control" (v.25). The exact word used twice in this verse (*pr*ʿ) is found in the warning of Proverbs 29:18: "Where there is no revelation [i.e., message from or attention to the word of God], the people cast off all moral restraints [i.e., they become ungovernable]" (my tr.). The idea of (*pr*ʿ) as "to cast off all restraints" is

that of loosening or uncovering. It appears that there is a type of religious prostitution connected with the people's worship of the golden calf.

Moses realizes that decisive action is required. So he challenges the people, "Whoever is for the LORD come to me" (v.26). The Hebrew is literally, "Whoever [is] for the LORD — to me!" (cf. Jos 24:14 – 15; 1Ki 18:21; Mt 6:24). "All" in "all the Levites" is undoubtedly a generalization, since Deuteronomy 33:9 implies that some of the Levites are also slain in the action that follows (v.28).

27 – 29 The Levites who choose to follow God (v.26) are commanded to arm themselves and "go back and forth . . . killing" (v.27). This is not the command of a prophet but of a holy God (cf. the demand for absolute holiness in Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26 [cf. 19:6]). No small number of people must pay the consequences for their stiff-neckedness (Ex 32:28; cf. Ac 2:41). Following God then as now sometimes requires denying one's family and being cut off from them (v.29; cf. Lk 12:51 – 53; 14:26). A necessary part of consecration is being obedient to the Lord's command, which always results in his blessings (v.29). The Levites wholeheartedly follow God (Jos 14:8) and count other ties of kinship as nothing in comparison (Dt 33:9), just as Phinehas later is "as zealous as I am for my honor among them" (Nu 25:11; cf. Ps 139:21).

NOTES

1 The plural אֱלֹהִים (*ʾĕlōhîm*, "gods") is demanded by the plural verb יֵלְכוּ (*yēlkû*, "who will go [plural] before us"), even though Elohim might legitimately be translated "God" in a plural of majesty where a singular verbal form is used (cf. Ne 9:18; Ac 7:40).

4 וַיִּצַר (*wayyāṣar*, "he made") can either be a Qal form of צור (*ṣwr*) or a Hiphil of צרר (*ṣrr*). But the verb יצר (*yṣr*) means "to form," not the hollow or reduplicated verbal forms. However, the verb *ṣwr* with the meaning "to cast out of metal" is used in 1 Kings 7:15 (so Childs, 555 – 56).

On the basis of Isaiah 8:1, חֶרֶט (*heret*, "a tool") traditionally has been interpreted

as an engraving tool for working metal. How this tool is used with a calf made by pouring molten metal into a form is not known.

29 The NIV follows the LXX,Vulgate, and Targum and renders מִלְּאוּ (*milPú*, "you have been set apart") as a past tense (the KJV makes it an imperative: "Consecrate"). The origin of the idiom may be in the custom described in 29:22 – 24 and Leviticus 8:22 – 29, a gesture of presentation inasmuch as the animal is called the "ram for the ordination" (lit., "the ram of filling").

REFLECTION

God's repentance or "relenting" (v.14) is an anthropomorphism (a description of God in human form) that aims at showing us that he can and does change in his actions and emotions toward human beings when given proper grounds for doing so, and thereby he does not change in his basic integrity or character (cf. Pss 99:6; 106:45; Jer 18:8; Am 7:3, 6; Jnh 3:10; Jas 5:16). The grounds for the Lord's repenting are: (1) intercession (cf. Am 7:1 – 6); (2) repentance of the people (Jer 18:3 – 11; Jnh 3:9 – 10); and (3) compassion (Dt 32:36; Jdg 2:18; 2Sa 24:16).

2. Mediation of Moses (32:30 – 35)

30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great
sin. But now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for
your sin."
31 So Moses went back to the LORD and said, "Oh, what a great sin these
people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. 32 But
now, please forgive their sin — but if not, then blot me out of the book you
have written."
33 The LORD replied to Moses,"Whoever has sinned against me I will
blot out of my book. 34 Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and
my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to
punish, I will punish them for their sin."
35 And the LORD struck the people with a plague because of what they

did with the calf Aaron had made.

COMMENTARY

30 Even though the people have repented, atonement for sin is still needed. Moses will attempt (in the basic meaning of "to make atonement") to ransom or deliver the people from the certain judgment of their sin by offering a substitute — himself.

31 – 32 Moses ascends the mountain once again and proceeds to intercede in prayer on Israel's behalf a second time (v.31).The sincerity of Moses' devotion to his people is seen in his request: "Blot me out of the book" (v.32; cf. Ro 9:1 – 3). The "book" or "scroll" is called the "book of the living" in Psalm 69:28 and is referred to in Isaiah 4:3: "recorded among the living" (cf. Eze 13:9; Da 12:1; Mal 3:16; cf. the roll of those inheriting eternal life in Php 4:3; Rev 3:5; 20:12, 15; 21:27).

33 – 34 The Lord refuses Moses' offer and replies, "Whoever has sinned . . . I will blot out of my book" (v.33; cf. Pss 9:5; 51:1). Thus the OT principle is reaffirmed: the person who sins is accountable for his or her own sin (cf. Dt 24:16; Eze 18:4, 13, 17). Whereas in the past the Lord led (12:42, 51; 13:17; 15:13; 20:2), with Moses being only God's servant, from now on Moses and an angel are to lead (v.34). "The time comes for me to punish" is literally, "in the day of my visitation." Perhaps this is the beginning of the day-of-the-Lord warnings by the later prophets.

35 The order of events is probably not in strict chronological sequence; hence the plague may well be the slaughter of the three thousand mentioned in v.28. The plague comes on the people because they caused the calf to be made or asked for it. Frequently in Scripture events may be directly attributed to people when they have only occasioned them, since as a member of a community the one can implicate the many, just as today one traitor can compromise a whole army or nation. For example, Judas is said to have purchased the field that the priests actually purchased, since it was Judas's returned money that occasioned it (Ac 1:18).

3. Threatened Separation and Moses' Prayer (33:1 – 23)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' [2]I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. [3]Go up to the land fl owing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

[4]When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. [5]For the LORD had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites, 'You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.' " [6]So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

[7]Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. [8]And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. [9]As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. [10]Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. [11]The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

[12]Moses said to the LORD,"You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' [13]If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people."

[14]The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

[15]Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. [16]How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"

[17]And the LORD said to Moses,“I will do the very thing you have asked,
because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”
[18]Then Moses said, “Now show me your glory.”
[19]And the LORD said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of
you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have
mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I
will have compassion. [20]But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for no one
may see me and live.”
[21]Then the LORD said, “There is a place near me where you may stand
on a rock. [22]When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock
and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. [23]Then I will remove
my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.”

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 The Lord issues the command to move on (v.1), promising to “send an angel” before them (v.2; cf. 23:20, 23; 32:34). The angel promised here is altogether different from “the angel of his presence” in Isaiah 63:9, since God declares that his “Name is in him” (23:21). Thus this angel is a christophany, an appearance of Christ in the OT. Though the Lord promises to send his personal representative, he himself will “not go with [them]” (v.3). This withdrawal of the divine presence that was previously assured in 23:20 – 23 is because of the presence of sin.

4 – 6 The people would rather risk the danger of divine chastisement than be deprived of the divine presence; hence they begin to mourn and desist from putting on any further ornaments (v.4). Reminded once more of their stubbornness, the people are asked to “take off [their] ornaments” (v.5), i.e., the ones they are already wearing, as a test of their repentance. Akin to putting on sackcloth and ashes, the people strip off their ornaments as a sign of mourning for their sin (v.6; cf. Ge 35:4; Eze 26:16).

7 – 11 This “tent . . . outside the camp” (v.7) is different from the tabernacle or “Tent of Meeting,” with its ark and other furniture where the Lord permanently dwells. This “tent of meeting” is outside the camp and is a temporary structure used until the more permanent shelter is constructed (cf. 27:21 et al.).

The verbs in v.7 show that Moses customarily erected this tent. Moses visited this tent whenever he desired a meeting with the Lord (v.8).When Moses entered it, “the pillar of cloud would come down” (v.9) — an indication that the Lord was communicating with Moses — and there God would talk with him “as a man speaks with his friend” (v.11; cf. Nu 12:8; Dt 34:10). A similar descent will later cap the completion of the tabernacle (40:33 – 34; see comment on 13:21). The presence of the pillar of the cloud at the tent’s entrance evokes a spirit of worship from the people (v.10).

12 – 14 As the time approaches for Moses to take up the lead of the Israelites, he becomes concerned as to the identity of the companion God has promised him (32:34; 33:2). He believes that a mere angel is no substitute for the presence of God. “I know you by name” (v.12) is tantamount to saying, “I have singled you out” or “I have chosen/selected you.” There are six uses of the verb *yādaʿ* (“to know, teach” in v.13) in five verses (vv.12 – 17). Moses asks the Lord for a demonstration of his love so that he might know and serve him better (v.13). The Lord responds by promising, “My Presence [lit., ‘my face’] will go with you” (v.14). With this new word the Lord reinstates the angel of his presence, in whom he has invested his “Name” (23:20 – 21), as the leader of Israel’s way to Canaan.

15 – 18 Moses beseeches God not to send the people out without his “Presence” to lead them (v.15). Moses knows that God’s presence is essential to Israel’s testimony before the world (v.16). Without it they will be indistinguishable from the rest of the world. That is the response the Lord is waiting for; so he tells Moses that it will be as he has requested (v.17). But Moses seeks one further thing: he desires to see God’s “glory” (v.18).

19 – 20 In response to Moses’ request to see God’s “glory,” God says he will “cause all [of his] goodness to pass” before Moses (v.19). By his “goodness” is meant his whole character and nature. In a later theophany the Lord passed by what may have been the same cleft of the rock (cave) for the discouraged prophet Elijah (1Ki 19:11).

A further aspect of the revelation of God’s glory is the proclamation of his name. The name of God includes his nature, character, person (Ps 20:1; Lk

24:47; Jn 1:12), doctrine (Ps 22:22; Jn 17:6, 26), and standards of ethical and moral living (Mic 4:5). In this context his name includes his "mercy" (i.e., his "grace") and his "compassion" (*rehem*, lit., "womb, bowels," i.e., deep-seated feelings; GK 8167). Romans 9:15 quotes this verse and applies it to the sovereignty of God. The one restriction of the Lord is that Moses will not be permitted to see the Lord's face (v.20). In fact, "no one may see me and live" (v.20; see Jn 1:18; 6:46; 1Ti 1:17; 1Jn 4:12).

21 – 23 To see God's glory, Moses must stand on a "rock" (v.21; cf. Mt 7:24 – 27). When the glory passes by, Moses will be hidden in the "cleft in the rock" and covered by the Lord's hand (v.22). Then the hand of God will be removed so that Moses might see God's back (v.23). "Hand" and "back" are anthropomorphisms (i.e., descriptions of the reality of God in terms or analogies understandable to humans; see comment on the "finger of God" in 8:19; 31:18; cf. Ps 8:3; Lk 11:20; cf. likewise the "hand of God" in 1Sa 6:9; Ps 109:27). When one puts together God's "glory" and his "back," the best understanding of this situation is that Moses cannot look at the direct manifestation of God's glory. He is protected by the shielding "hand" of God, so that only the "afterglow" of the passing "glory" (hence "back") is all Moses (or we) can take!

NOTE

23 אָחֹרַי (*ʾāḥōray*, "my back") is used of the "back" of the tabernacle (26:12), the "backs" of the twelve bronze oxen holding the molten sea in the temple courtyard (1Ki 7:25), and the "backs" of men worshiping in the temple in Ezekiel's day (Eze 8:16). But since God is Spirit and has no form, and since no one can see him and live (v.20), *ʾāḥōray* can just as well and more accurately be rendered "the after effects" of his radiant glory, which has just passed by.

4. Renewal of the Covenant (34:1 – 35)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the fi rst tablets, which you broke. [2]Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. [3]No one is to

come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain."

[4]So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the LORD had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. [5]Then the LORD came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the LORD. [6]And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, [7]maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

[8]Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. [9]"O Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes," he said, "then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance."

[10]Then the LORD said: "I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the LORD, will do for you. [11]Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. [12]Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you. [13]Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and cut down their Asherah poles. [14]Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

[15]"Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land; for when they prostitute themselves to their gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices. [16]And when you choose some of their daughters as wives for your sons and those daughters prostitute themselves to their gods, they will lead your sons to do the same.

[17]"Do not make cast idols.

[18]"Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread. For seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt.

[19]"The first offspring of every womb belongs to me, including all the fi rstborn males of your livestock, whether from herd or fl ock. [20]Redeem the

firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons.

"No one is to appear before me empty-handed.

21"Six days you shall labor, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during the plowing season and harvest you must rest.

22"Celebrate the Feast of Weeks with the firstfruits of the wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the turn of the year. 23Three times a year all your men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD, the God of Israel. 24I will drive out nations before you and enlarge your territory, and no one will covet your land when you go up three times each year to appear before the LORD your God.

25"Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast, and do not let any of the sacrifice from the Passover Feast remain until morning.

26"Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God.

"Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk."

27Then the LORD said to Moses,"Write down these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel." 28Moses was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights without eating bread or drinking water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant — the Ten Commandments.

29When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. 30When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him. 31But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. 32Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.

33When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. 34But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 Since Moses had broken the former tablets (32:19), which "were the work of God" (32:16), it is appropriate that he "chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones" (v.1). No contradiction exists between God's statement that he "will write on them the words that were on the first tablets" and vv.27 – 28, where Moses does the actual writing. Apparently these are alternative ways of saying the same thing: What Moses says, God says, and vice versa. The law is the direct expression of the mind and will of God. Some make v.27 a pluperfect: "the LORD had said to Moses, 'Write down these words,' " referring thereby to 24:3 – 8, where Moses was directly responsible for the contents of the Book of the Covenant of chs. 21 – 23.

4 – 7 Moses obediently follows the Lord's directions and prepares two new stone tablets. Then early the next morning he brings them to the Lord on top of Mount Sinai (v.4). The Lord once more appears before Moses and proclaims his name: "the LORD" (v.5; see comment on 33:19 and God's declaration of his identity in 20:2). Then the Lord passes "in front of Moses" (v.6; see on 33:19). The Lord's self-disclosure is prefaced by the repetition of his name: "The LORD, the LORD," repeated perhaps to emphasize his unchangeableness (see also the comments on 3:14 – 15; 6:2 – 3).

Verses 6b – 7 are repeated elsewhere in the OT (see Nu 14:18; 2Ch 30:9; Ne 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; 116:5; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jnh 4:2; Na 1:3). On "compassionate," see comment on 33:19; see also Reflection.

8 – 9 The revelation of God's person and character humble Moses (v.8) and cause him once more to plead for God's grace to be given to his people, stiff-necked and wicked though they be (v.9).

10 – 14 The Lord's statement in v.10,"I am making a covenant with you," is not to be understood as the instituting of a second covenant in vv.10 – 27 but is best seen as a renewing of the same covenant after the events of ch. 33. The word "wonders" (*niplāʾot*) is used of the plagues sent on Egypt (3:20). These wonders will be so outstanding that the people will be awestruck. For Israel to benefit from God's miraculous display, however, they must be obedient to his commands (v.11). On the Amorites, Canaanites, et al., see comment and Notes

on 3:8.

The Lord further warns the Israelites not to become involved in unholy alliances (v.12; cf. 2Co 6:14). More than that, they are to take the initiative and eliminate the pagan "altars .. . sacred stones and . .. Asherah poles" (v.13).The Asherah were probably sacred trees or wooden poles placed alongside Baal's altar (Jdg 6:25; 1Ki 15:13; 2Ki 21:7). With the pagan religious objects removed, there will be less temptation to "worship any other god" (v.14).

The word "jealous" (*qannā'*; GK 7862) is mentioned twice for emphasis (see comment on 20:5). This word is used only of God, occurring but five times in the OT, and illustrates the parallel between idolatry and adultery. As a husband of those days had the right to put to death an unfaithful wife and her paramour (Dt 22:22),"so God relates to his people" (*TWOT* 2:803).

15 – 16 Once more the warning against unholy alliances is sounded (v.15). This time some of the "snares" (cf. v.12) are given: (1) "they will invite you and you will eat their sacrifices," and (2) "you [will] choose . . . their daughters as wives" (v.16). Both actions lead to idolatry.

17 The prohibition against making "cast idols" is most relevant, given the experience related in ch. 32 (see also comment on 20:4 – 6).

18 – 26 For these verses see comments on 23:14 – 19. The way of obedience balances prohibitions with admonitions: "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread" (see comment on 12:14 – 20). Regarding "the first offspring . . . belongs to me" (v.19), see comment on 13:11 – 16. See comment on 20:8 – 11 for laboring six days and resting one. In 23:16 the "Feast of Weeks" (v.22) is called the "Feast of Harvest."

The Lord adds a special promise for the pilgrim to the three annual feasts that require his presence (vv.23 – 24). The Lord will protect the pilgrim's land from his ungodly neighbor, who might move the boundary markers or steal from the land while the pilgrim is absent. The statement "when you go up three times each year" (v.24) looks forward to the time when the people are settled in the land; it need not imply that this verse is written later (cf. Dt 16:16). On v.25, see comment on 23:18. For the law and theology of the "firstfruits," see comment

23:19 (cf. 4:22; 11:5; 12:29).

27 – 28 For the Lord's commanding of Moses to "write down these words" (v.27), see comment on v.1. For "forty days and forty nights" (v.28), see comment on 24:18. That Moses is able to go for this length of time without food or water is a miracle requiring the Lord's supernatural care (cf. Dt 9:9, 18; Mt 4:2).

29 – 32 Spending an extended period of time in the Lord's presence has a telling effect on Moses: "his face was radiant" (v.29). The verb *qaìran* (lit., "he radiated") is sometimes related to the noun *qeren* ("horn"). The Vulgate confused these two, which thus led to the representation in medieval art of Moses wearing two horns! Moses' radiant countenance is referred to three times (vv.29, 30, 35; cf. W. F. Albright, "The Natural Face of Moses in Light of Ugaritic," *BASOR* 94 [1944]: 32 – 35; J. Morgenstern, "Moses with the Shining Face," *HUCA* 2 [1925]: 1:27).

The manifestation of the divine countenance strikes fear in the Israelites (v.30). A word from Moses, however, encourages Aaron, the leaders, and all the Israelites to approach him; and he thus delivers the word of the Lord to them (vv.31 – 32).

33 – 35 Moses' radiance is only visible to the people when he is acting as the oracle of God (v.33). At other times he keeps his face veiled. This is not a priest's mask as in Canaanite culture (see Notes), for Moses leaves the veil off when speaking to the people as God's messenger or when he is alone in God's presence (v.34).

Paul's use of this text in 2 Corinthians 3:7 – 18 is *not* an example of rabbinic exegesis or allegorization of an OT passage. He does not assign two different motives to Moses for wearing the veil, viz., (1) because the people were (unnecessarily) frightened and (2) to prevent the people from seeing the dimming end of what was fading away. There was no danger of the termination that was just beginning, but there was the danger (in Moses' symbolic, prophetic action) of the people's iniquities blocking their vision of the "ultimate significance" of that word of God just revealed. "Whenever he entered . . . he removed the veil" indicates the customary action of Moses' practice (in 2Co 3:7,

13, Paul used iterative imperfects to the same end).

NOTES

18 – 26 For a different view of these verses, which are paralleled by 13:12 – 13; 23:12, 14 – 19, see H. Kosmala, “The So-Called Ritual Decalogue,” *ASTI* 1 (1962): 31 – 61.

33 Many attempt to link מַסְוֶה (*masweh*, “veil”) with the “mask” sometimes worn by priests in Egypt and the pottery masks discovered at Hazor and Gezer from the Late Bronze Age — masks possibly used by Canaanite priests. But these practices are unattested in the OT.

REFLECTION

The “gracious God” (34:6 – 7) bestows his unmerited favor on those who have no claim whatsoever on it. His graciousness is explicated by being “slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.” But his grace is balanced, for “he does not leave the guilty unpunished.” The other side of our merciful and loving God is his justice and righteousness. Woe to those who reject God’s grace! His chastisement will be felt to the “third and fourth generation.” The full formula (see 20:5) includes the important qualifier, “of those who hate me.”

C. Building the Tabernacle (35:1 – 40:38)

1. Summons to Build (35:1 – 19)

[1]Moses assembled the whole Israelite community and said to them, “These are the things the LORD has commanded you to do: [2]For six days, work is to be done, but the seventh day shall be your holy day, a Sabbath of

rest to the LORD. Whoever does any work on it must be put to death. [3]Do not light a fire in any of your dwellings on the Sabbath day."

[4]Moses said to the whole Israelite community, "This is what the LORD has commanded: [5]From what you have, take an offering for the LORD. Everyone who is willing is to bring to the LORD an offering of gold, silver and bronze; [6]blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen; goat hair; [7]ram skins dyed red and hides of sea cows; acacia wood; [8]olive oil for the light; spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense; [9]and onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the ephod and breastpiece.

[10]"All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the LORD has commanded: [11]the tabernacle with its tent and its covering, clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases; [12]the ark with its poles and the atonement cover and the curtain that shields it; [13]the table with its poles and all its articles and the bread of the Presence; 14the lampstand that is for light with its accessories, lamps and oil for the light; [15]the altar of incense with its poles, the anointing oil and the fragrant incense; the curtain for the doorway at the entrance to the tabernacle; [16]the altar of burnt offering with its bronze grating, its poles and all its utensils; the bronze basin with its stand; [17]the curtains of the courtyard with its posts and bases, and the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard; [18]the tent pegs for the tabernacle and for the courtyard, and their ropes; [19]the woven garments worn for ministering in the sanctuary — both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments for his sons when they serve as priests."

COMMENTARY

1 – 3 After he has gathered the Israelites together, Moses relays to them the commands of the Lord (v.1). The Sabbath, the sign of the covenant, is mentioned first (v.2) — an indication of its importance. On "a Sabbath of rest," see comments on 20:8 – 11 and 31:12 – 17. Though the prohibition against lighting a fire on the Sabbath (v.3) is not mentioned elsewhere, it is implied in part in 16:23.

4 Almost every item in 25:1 - 30:10 is repeated in 35:4 - 40:38 in identical or similar words, except that the verbs are mainly in the past tense instead of the

future tense as previously. Some, surprised by such lengthy repetitions (though unnecessarily so), conclude that these are additions by a later writer; but such theorists are unaware of how such matters are reported in the ancient Near East. It is customary to repeat the instructions by a literal repetition of the terms except for a change in verbal forms; e.g., in the Ugaritic epic of Keret from this same era (thirteenth to fourteenth century BC), some ninety lines are repeated.

"This is what the LORD has commanded" repeats v.1 to revert back to the primary theme after the prefatory words about observing the Sabbath (cf. Lev 23:2, 4).

5 – 9 See comments on 25:3 – 7. The differences are negligible except for the introductory words in 25:3, which would be out of place here.

10 – 19 See comments on 25:1 – 28:43; 30:1 – 10, 17 – 38; cf. 31:7 – 11.

2. Voluntary Gifts Collected (35:20 – 29)

[20]Then the whole Israelite community withdrew from Moses' presence,
[21]and everyone who was willing and whose heart moved him came and
brought an offering to the LORD for the work on the Tent of Meeting, for
all its service, and for the sacred garments. [22]All who were willing, men
and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches,
earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave
offering to the LORD. [23]Everyone who had blue, purple or scarlet yarn or
fine linen, or goat hair, ram skins dyed red or hides of sea cows brought
them. [24]Those presenting an offering of silver or bronze brought it as an
offering to the LORD, and everyone who had acacia wood for any part of
the work brought it. [25]Every skilled woman spun with her hands and
brought what she had spun — blue, purple or scarlet yarn or fine linen.
[26]And all the women who were willing and had the skill spun the goat hair.
[27]The leaders brought onyx stones and other gems to be mounted on the
ephod and breastpiece. [28]They also brought spices and olive oil for the light
and for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense. [29]All the Israelite men
and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for

all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.

COMMENTARY

20 – 29 After receiving Moses' instructions, the people set about doing their tasks (v.20). Those whose hearts are moved bring offerings for the tabernacle and its related ser vice (v.21).The willingness of the people is mentioned repeatedly (vv.21 – 22, 26, 29; 36:2). "Men and women alike" (v.22) are specifically mentioned to avoid the misapprehension that "everyone" (vv.21, 23) excludes women even though vv.25 – 26 mention women in another connection. On the various gifts of the people, see comments on 25:1 – 7.

Some may question the mention of "acacia wood" in v.24, as though the Israelites were carrying planks of wood from Egypt. The tree is native to the Sinai peninsula, so it seems more probable that the trees were felled en route and shaped as needed. Different, however, is the mention in v.28 of olive oil, which is probably part of the plunder they brought from Egypt.

3. Bezalel and His Artisans (35:30 – 36:7)

[30]Then Moses said to the Israelites,"See, the LORD has chosen Bezalel
son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, [31]and he has filled him with
the Spirit of God, with skill, ability and knowledge in all kinds of crafts —
[32]to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, [33]to cut and
set stones, to work in wood and to engage in all kinds of artistic
craftsmanship. [34]And he has given both him and Oholiab son of
Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, the ability to teach others. [35]He has filled
them with skill to do all kinds of work as craftsmen, designers,
embroiderers in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen, and weavers —
all of them master craftsmen and designers. [36:1]So Bezalel, Oholiab and
every skilled person to whom the LORD has given skill and ability to know
how to carry out all the work of constructing the sanctuary are to do the
work just as the LORD has commanded."

[2]Then Moses summoned Bezalel and Oholiab and every skilled person to
whom the LORD had given ability and who was willing to come and do the

work. [3]They received from Moses all the offerings the Israelites had brought to carry out the work of constructing the sanctuary. And the people continued to bring freewill offerings morning after morning. [4]So all the skilled craftsmen who were doing all the work on the sanctuary left their work [5]and said to Moses, "The people are bringing more than enough for doing the work the LORD commanded to be done."

[6]Then Moses gave an order and they sent this word throughout the camp: "No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary." And so the people were restrained from bringing more, 7because what they already had was more than enough to do all the work.

COMMENTARY

30 – 35 For these verses see comments on 31:2 – 6. God not only gives the plans for the tabernacle, but he also appoints the artisans who will carry out those plans. God's selection and equipping of Bezalel (vv.30 – 31) is so that he can "engage in all kinds of artistic craftsmanship" (v.32; lit., "engage in every work of thought"). This includes implementing the plan or thought previously given for the project (cf. 31:4 – 5).Verse 34 adds that Bezalel is given "the ability to teach others," a capability of training and guiding assistants who work with these two artificers. All the abilities these gifted craftsmen own come from the expertise God has given to them. Verse 35 is almost all new.

36:1 – 7 The chapter division here is unfortunate, for no break is signified by the verb, as though the account now turns to the execution of the work by these craftsmen. The willingness of the people exceeds the requirements of the craftsmen, so the order is given to the people to make no further offerings for the sanctuary (vv.4 – 7). This is a noteworthy illustration of generosity for the Lord's work.

4. Progress of the Work and Moses' Blessing (36:8 – 39:43)

[8]All the skilled men among the workmen made the tabernacle with ten curtains of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn, with cherubim worked into them by a skilled craftsman. [9]All the curtains were

the same size — twenty-eight cubits long and four cubits wide. [10]They joined five of the curtains together and did the same with the other five. [11]Then they made loops of blue material along the edge of the end curtain in one set, and the same was done with the end curtain in the other set. [12]They also made fifty loops on one curtain and fifty loops on the end curtain of the other set, with the loops opposite each other. [13]Then they made fifty gold clasps and used them to fasten the two sets of curtains together so that the tabernacle was a unit.

[14]They made curtains of goat hair for the tent over the tabernacle — eleven altogether. [15]All eleven curtains were the same size — thirty cubits long and four cubits wide. [16]They joined five of the curtains into one set and the other six into another set. [17]Then they made fifty loops along the edge of the end curtain in one set and also along the edge of the end curtain in the other set. [18]They made fifty bronze clasps to fasten the tent together as a unit. [19]Then they made for the tent a covering of ram skins dyed red, and over that a covering of hides of sea cows.

[20]They made upright frames of acacia wood for the tabernacle. [21]Each frame was ten cubits long and a cubit and a half wide, [22]with two projections set parallel to each other. They made all the frames of the tabernacle in this way. [23]They made twenty frames for the south side of the tabernacle [24]and made forty silver bases to go under them — two bases for each frame, one under each projection. [25]For the other side, the north side of the tabernacle, they made twenty frames [26]and forty silver bases — two under each frame. [27]They made six frames for the far end, that is, the west end of the tabernacle, [28]and two frames were made for the corners of the tabernacle at the far end. [29]At these two corners the frames were double from the bottom all the way to the top and fitted into a single ring; both were made alike. [30]So there were eight frames and sixteen silver bases — two under each frame.

[31]They also made crossbars of acacia wood: five for the frames on one side of the tabernacle, [32]five for those on the other side, and five for the frames on the west, at the far end of the tabernacle. [33]They made the center crossbar so that it extended from end to end at the middle of the frames. [34]They overlaid the frames with gold and made gold rings to hold the crossbars. They also overlaid the crossbars with gold.

[35]They made the curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen, with cherubim worked into it by a skilled craftsman. [36]They made four posts of acacia wood for it and overlaid them with gold. They made gold hooks for them and cast their four silver bases. [37]For the entrance to the tent they made a curtain of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen — the work of an embroiderer; [38]and they made five posts with hooks for them. They overlaid the tops of the posts and their bands with gold and made their five bases of bronze.

[37:1]Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood — two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. [2]He overlaid it with pure gold, both inside and out, and made a gold molding around it. [3]He cast four gold rings for it and fastened them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. [4]Then he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. [5]And he inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it.

[6]He made the atonement cover of pure gold — two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide. [7]Then he made two cherubim out of hammered gold at the ends of the cover. [8]He made one cherub on one end and the second cherub on the other; at the two ends he made them of one piece with the cover. [9]The cherubim had their wings spread upward, overshadowing the cover with them. The cherubim faced each other, looking toward the cover.

[10]They made the table of acacia wood — two cubits long, a cubit wide, and a cubit and a half high. [11]Then they overlaid it with pure gold and made a gold molding around it. [12]They also made around it a rim a handbreadth wide and put a gold molding on the rim. [13]They cast four gold rings for the table and fastened them to the four corners, where the four legs were. [14]The rings were put close to the rim to hold the poles used in carrying the table. [15]The poles for carrying the table were made of acacia wood and were overlaid with gold. [16]And they made from pure gold the articles for the table — its plates and dishes and bowls and its pitchers for the pouring out of drink offerings.

[17]They made the lampstand of pure gold and hammered it out, base and shaft; its flowerlike cups, buds and blossoms were of one piece with it. [18]Six branches extended from the sides of the lampstand — three on one side and three on the other. [19]Three cups shaped like almond flowers with

buds and blossoms were on one branch, three on the next branch and the same for all six branches extending from the lampstand. [20]And on the lampstand were four cups shaped like almond flowers with buds and blossoms. [21]One bud was under the first pair of branches extending from the lampstand, a second bud under the second pair, and a third bud under the third pair — six branches in all. [22]The buds and the branches were all of one piece with the lampstand, hammered out of pure gold.

[23]They made its seven lamps, as well as its wick trimmers and trays, of pure gold. [24]They made the lampstand and all its accessories from one talent of pure gold.

[25]They made the altar of incense out of acacia wood. It was square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high — its horns of one piece with it. [26]They overlaid the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and made a gold molding around it. [27]They made two gold rings below the molding — two on opposite sides — to hold the poles used to carry it. [28]They made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold.

[29]They also made the sacred anointing oil and the pure, fragrant incense — the work of a perfumer.

[38:1]They built the altar of burnt offering of acacia wood, three cubits high; it was square, five cubits long and five cubits wide. [2]They made a horn at each of the four corners, so that the horns and the altar were of one piece, and they overlaid the altar with bronze. [3]They made all its utensils of bronze — its pots, shovels, sprinkling bowls, meat forks and firepans. [4]They made a grating for the altar, a bronze network, to be under its ledge, halfway up the altar. [5]They cast bronze rings to hold the poles for the four corners of the bronze grating. [6]They made the poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with bronze. [7]They inserted the poles into the rings so they would be on the sides of the altar for carrying it. They made it hollow, out of boards.

[8]They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

[9]Next they made the courtyard. The south side was a hundred cubits long and had curtains of finely twisted linen, [10]with twenty posts and twenty bronze bases, and with silver hooks and bands on the posts. [11]The north side was also a hundred cubits long and had twenty posts and twenty bronze bases, with silver hooks and bands on the posts.

[12]The west end was fifty cubits wide and had curtains, with ten posts and ten bases, with silver hooks and bands on the posts. [13]The east end, toward the sunrise, was also fifty cubits wide. [14]Curtains fifteen cubits long were on one side of the entrance, with three posts and three bases, [15]and curtains fifteen cubits long were on the other side of the entrance to the courtyard, with three posts and three bases. [16]All the curtains around the courtyard were of finely twisted linen. [17]The bases for the posts were bronze. The hooks and bands on the posts were silver, and their tops were overlaid with silver; so all the posts of the courtyard had silver bands.

[18]The curtain for the entrance to the courtyard was of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen — the work of an embroiderer. It was twenty cubits long and, like the curtains of the courtyard, five cubits high, [19]with four posts and four bronze bases. Their hooks and bands were silver, and their tops were overlaid with silver. [20]All the tent pegs of the tabernacle and of the surrounding courtyard were bronze.

[21]These are the amounts of the materials used for the tabernacle, the tabernacle of the Testimony, which were recorded at Moses' command by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar son of Aaron, the priest. [22](Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, made everything the LORD commanded Moses; [23]with him was Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan — a craftsman and designer, and an embroiderer in blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen.) [24]The total amount of the gold from the wave offering used for all the work on the sanctuary was 29 talents and 730 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel.

[25]The silver obtained from those of the community who were counted in the census was 100 talents and 1,775 shekels, according to the sanctuary shekel — [26]one beka per person, that is, half a shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, from everyone who had crossed over to those counted, twenty years old or more, a total of 603,550 men. [27]The 100 talents of silver were used to cast the bases for the sanctuary and for the curtain — 100 bases from the 100 talents, one talent for each base. [28]They used the 1,775 shekels to make the hooks for the posts, to overlay the tops of the posts, and to make their bands.

[29]The bronze from the wave offering was 70 talents and 2,400 shekels. [30]They used it to make the bases for the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the bronze altar with its bronze grating and all its utensils, [31]the bases for the

surrounding courtyard and those for its entrance and all the tent pegs for the tabernacle and those for the surrounding courtyard.

39:1From the blue, purple and scarlet yarn they made woven garments for ministering in the sanctuary. They also made sacred garments for Aaron, as the LORD commanded Moses.

2They made the ephod of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. 3They hammered out thin sheets of gold and cut strands to be worked into the blue, purple and scarlet yarn and fine linen — the work of a skilled craftsman. 4They made shoulder pieces for the ephod, which were attached to two of its corners, so it could be fastened. 5Its skillfully woven waistband was like it — of one piece with the ephod and made with gold, and with blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and with finely twisted linen, as the LORD commanded Moses.

6They mounted the onyx stones in gold filigree settings and engraved them like a seal with the names of the sons of Israel. 7Then they fastened them on the shoulder pieces of the ephod as memorial stones for the sons of Israel, as the LORD commanded Moses.

8They fashioned the breastpiece — the work of a skilled craftsman. They made it like the ephod: of gold, and of blue, purple and scarlet yarn, and of finely twisted linen. 9It was square — a span long and a span wide — and folded double. 10Then they mounted four rows of precious stones on it. In the first row there was a ruby, a topaz and a beryl; 11in the second row a turquoise, a sapphire and an emerald; 12in the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst; 13in the fourth row a chrysolite, an onyx and a jasper. They were mounted in gold filigree settings. 14There were twelve stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel, each engraved like a seal with the name of one of the twelve tribes.

15For the breastpiece they made braided chains of pure gold, like a rope. 16They made two gold filigree settings and two gold rings, and fastened the rings to two of the corners of the breastpiece. 17They fastened the two gold chains to the rings at the corners of the breastpiece, 18and the other ends of the chains to the two settings, attaching them to the shoulder pieces of the ephod at the front. 19They made two gold rings and attached them to the other two corners of the breastpiece on the inside edge next to the ephod. 20Then they made two more gold rings and attached them to the bottom of the shoulder pieces on the front of the ephod, close to the seam just above

the waistband of the ephod. [21]They tied the rings of the breastpiece to the rings of the ephod with blue cord, connecting it to the waistband so that the breastpiece would not swing out from the ephod — as the LORD commanded Moses.

[22]They made the robe of the ephod entirely of blue cloth — the work of a weaver —[23]with an opening in the center of the robe like the opening of a collar, and a band around this opening, so that it would not tear. [24]They made pomegranates of blue, purple and scarlet yarn and finely twisted linen around the hem of the robe. [25]And they made bells of pure gold and attached them around the hem between the pomegranates. [26]The bells and pomegranates alternated around the hem of the robe to be worn for ministering, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[27]For Aaron and his sons, they made tunics of fine linen — the work of a weaver — [28]and the turban of fine linen, the linen headbands and the undergarments of finely twisted linen. [29]The sash was of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn — the work of an embroiderer — as the LORD commanded Moses.

[30]They made the plate, the sacred diadem, out of pure gold and engraved on it, like an inscription on a seal: HOLY TO THE LORD. [31]Then they fastened a blue cord to it to attach it to the turban, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[32]So all the work on the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, was completed. The Israelites did everything just as the LORD commanded Moses. [33]Then they brought the tabernacle to Moses: the tent and all its furnishings, its clasps, frames, crossbars, posts and bases; [34]the covering of ram skins dyed red, the covering of hides of sea cows and the shielding curtain; [35]the ark of the Testimony with its poles and the atonement cover; [36]the table with all its articles and the bread of the Presence; [37]the pure gold lampstand with its row of lamps and all its accessories, and the oil for the light; [38]the gold altar, the anointing oil, the fragrant incense, and the curtain for the entrance to the tent; [39]the bronze altar with its bronze grating, its poles and all its utensils; the basin with its stand; [40]the curtains of the courtyard with its posts and bases, and the curtain for the entrance to the courtyard; the ropes and tent pegs for the courtyard; all the furnishings for the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting; [41]and the woven garments worn for ministering in the sanctuary, both the sacred garments for Aaron the priest and the garments

for his sons when serving as priests.
[42]The Israelites had done all the work just as the LORD had commanded Moses. [43]Moses inspected the work and saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded. So Moses blessed them.

COMMENTARY

8 – 19 The actual work on the tabernacle begins here. The order is different from the order of the instructions. The work of the curtains repeats 26:1 – 13 (see comments there).

20 – 34 On the frames and crossbars, see comments on 26:15 – 30.

35 – 38 The inner curtain is commented on in 26:31 – 35.

37:1 – 9 On the ark, see comments on 25:10 – 22. Bezalel is specifically mentioned with the work of the holiest of tabernacle objects.

10 – 16 On the table of the bread of the Presence, see comments on 25:23 – 30.

17 – 24 On the lampstand, see comments on 25:31 – 40.

25 – 29 On the altar of incense, see comments on 30:1 – 6. On the "sacred anointing oil," see comments on 25:6.

38:1 – 7 On the altar of burnt offering, see comments on 27:1 – 8.

8 On the bronze basin, see comments on 30:17 – 21.

9 – 20 On the tabernacle courtyard, see comments on 27:9 – 19.

38:21 – 39:1 These verses are an inventory of the tabernacle materials. Verses 25 – 26 give an insight into the population of Israel at this time. There are three

thousand shekels to a talent; therefore 3,000 x 100 = 300,000 + 1,775 = 301,775. Since each man (from twenty years and older) is valued at a half shekel, the total number of men able to bear arms is over six hundred thousand (301,775 x 2 = 603,550) — a number identical or nearly identical to the later counts of Numbers 1:46 (603,550) or 26:51 (601,730). Such a tally for the army more than justifies estimates of two million for the total population. (A talent weighs about seventy-five pounds, with each shekel amounting to about two thirds of an ounce. Therefore, it takes some forty shekels to make up one pound [75 x 40 = 3000]).

"As the LORD commanded Moses" is the emphasis of chs. 39 – 40. This clause occurs nine times in ch. 39 and seven times in ch. 40.

39:2 – 31 See comments on 28:6 – 43. "The sacred diadem" (v.30) is a new designation here, not found in 28:36 – 37.

32 – 41 The statement "so all the work . . . was completed" (v.32) is reminiscent of Genesis 2:1 – 2, the concluding words of the creation account. This section emphasizes that the Hebrews completed their work "just as the LORD commanded." The workmen, on behalf of all the people, "bring the tabernacle to Moses" (v.33). Once again the list of articles is repeated (cf. 35:11 – 19, with a shortened form occurring in 31:7 – 11)."With its row of lamps" is a new term for the lamps set in order on the lampstand (v.37).

42 – 43 "Moses . . . saw that they had done it just as the LORD had commanded" (v.43) is again parallel to the expression in Genesis 1:31. The conclusion is, "So Moses blessed them" (cf. Ge 1:22, 28; 2:3).

5. Erection of the Tabernacle (40:1 – 33)

[1]Then the LORD said to Moses: 2"Set up the tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting, on the first day of the first month. [3]Place the ark of the Testimony in it and shield the ark with the curtain. [4]Bring in the table and set out what belongs on it. Then bring in the lampstand and set up its lamps. [5]Place the gold altar of incense in front of the ark of the Testimony and put the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle.

6 “Place the altar of burnt offering in front of the entrance to the
tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting; 7 place the basin between the Tent of
Meeting and the altar and put water in it. 8 Set up the courtyard around it
and put the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard.
9 “Take the anointing oil and anoint the tabernacle and everything in it;
consecrate it and all its furnishings, and it will be holy. 10 Then anoint the
altar of burnt offering and all its utensils; consecrate the altar, and it will be
most holy. 11 Anoint the basin and its stand and consecrate them.
12 “Bring Aaron and his sons to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and
wash them with water. 13 Then dress Aaron in the sacred garments, anoint
him and consecrate him so he may serve me as priest. 14 Bring his sons and
dress them in tunics. 15 Anoint them just as you anointed their father, so they
may serve me as priests. Their anointing will be to a priesthood that will
continue for all generations to come.” 16 Moses did everything just as the
LORD commanded him.
17 So the tabernacle was set up on the first day of the first month in the
second year. 18 When Moses set up the tabernacle, he put the bases in place,
erected the frames, inserted the crossbars and set up the posts. 19 Then he
spread the tent over the tabernacle and put the covering over the tent, as the
LORD commanded him.
20 He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark, attached the poles to the
ark and put the atonement cover over it. 21 Then he brought the ark into the
tabernacle and hung the shielding curtain and shielded the ark of the
Testimony, as the LORD commanded him.
22 Moses placed the table in the Tent of Meeting on the north side of the
tabernacle outside the curtain 23 and set out the bread on it before the
LORD, as the LORD commanded him.
24 He placed the lampstand in the Tent of Meeting opposite the table on
the south side of the tabernacle 25 and set up the lamps before the LORD, as
the LORD commanded him.
26 Moses placed the gold altar in the Tent of Meeting in front of the
curtain 27 and burned fragrant incense on it, as the LORD commanded him.
28 Then he put up the curtain at the entrance to the tabernacle.
29 He set the altar of burnt offering near the entrance to the tabernacle, the
Tent of Meeting, and offered on it burnt offerings and grain offerings, as the
LORD commanded him.

[30]He placed the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar and put water in it for washing, [31]and Moses and Aaron and his sons used it to wash their hands and feet. [32]They washed whenever they entered the Tent of Meeting or approached the altar, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[33]Then Moses set up the courtyard around the tabernacle and altar and put up the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard. And so Moses finished the work.

COMMENTARY

1 – 5 The tabernacle is erected on the "first day of the first month" (v.2).Verse 17 adds that this is the beginning of the "second year" of the wilderness wanderings. Since the Hebrews entered the Sinai desert in the third month after the exodus (19:1), and since Moses was on Mount Sinai for two forty-day periods (24:18; 34:28) plus the events covered in 19:1 – 24:11 and chs. 32 – 33, the building of the tabernacle has taken less than six months' time.

Once again, as in 25:10 – 22, the ark — the most prominent object in the tabernacle — is the first to be mentioned (v.3). This is God's throne in the midst of Israel. The "curtain" and how it shields the ark is further described in v.21 (cf. also 26:31 – 35; 36:35 – 38).

On the "table" (v.4), see comments on 25:23 – 30; 37:10 – 16; on the "lampstand," see comments on 25:31 – 40; 37:17 – 24; on the "gold altar of incense" (v.5), see comments on 30:1 – 10, 34 – 38; 37:25 – 29.

6 – 8 On the "altar of burnt offering" (v.6), see comments on 27:1 – 8; 38:1 – 7; on the "basin" (v.7), see comments on 30:17 – 21; 38:8; on the "courtyard" (v.8), see comments on 27:9 – 19; 38:9 – 20.

9 – 11 On the "anointing oil," see comments on 25:6; 30:22 – 33. These instructions are carried out in Leviticus 8:10 – 12. "Consecrate it" is literally "sanctify it" in the sense of setting it apart for the service of the Lord.

12 – 16 The anointing and consecrating of the priesthood include Aaron and

his sons (v.15). The institution of the priesthood is “for all generations to come” (cf. 12:24; 27:21). Even though the hereditary priestly office of the Aaronic line has ended, Christ will carry it out perpetually.

17 – 33 Verse 17 parallels v.2 in almost every detail.Verses 18 – 33 contain seven subsections, each concluding with the formula, “as the LORD commanded him/Moses.”

1. “Moses set up the tabernacle” (v.18).
2. “He took the Testimony and placed it in the ark” (v.20; see 25:14, 16, 21).
3. “Moses placed the table” (v.22; 26:35; 40:4).
4. “He placed the lampstand” (v.24; 26:35; 40:4).
5. “Moses placed the gold altar” (v.26; 30:6; 40:5).
6. “He put up the curtain” (v.28) and “he set the altar of burnt offering” (v.29).
7. “He placed the basin” (v.30; 30:18; 40:7).

6. Dedication of the Tabernacle (40:34 – 38)

[34]Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the
LORD filled the tabernacle. [35]Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting
because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the
tabernacle.
[36]In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above
the tabernacle, they would set out; [37]but if the cloud did not lift, they did
not set out — until the day it lifted. [38]So the cloud of the LORD was over
the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all
the house of Israel during all their travels.

COMMENTARY

34 – 38 The tabernacle has been constructed and set in order as the Lord has commanded Moses; yet something is lacking. Form must be invested with divine life; so “the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (vv.34 – 35). On the Lord’s glory, see comments on 16:7, 10; 24:16 – 17; 33:18, 22. With the arrival of the

glory of the Lord, the nation of Israel is ready to move on. The promise of the divine messenger to lead the people is fulfilled (23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2). “The Lord now dwelled in their midst as their Leader, their King, and until they reached Canaan the Lord, by means of the cloud, determined whether Israel stayed or moved on” (Gispen, 335). The signal to journey is “whenever the cloud lifted” (v.36; cf. comment on 13:21; also 17:1; 25:22).

LEVITICUS

RICHARD S. HESS

Introduction

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6. Outline

1. NAME AND TEXT

The name “Leviticus” derives from the LXX. It is not so designated in the MT. There it is named according to the first word in Hebrew — *wayyiqrā*, “(and) he called.” This Hebrew custom is followed in all the books of the Pentateuch. The LXX, however, introduced a term that would describe the Levites, even though they are not mentioned in the book — neither the MT nor the LXX — except at 25:32 – 34.

The text seems well preserved in the MT, with need for few emendations. From the Dead Sea Scrolls, the paleo-Leviticus scroll (c. 100 BC) preserves a text that closely follows that of the MT.[1] Indeed, despite the huge variety of attestations of Leviticus in Dead Sea Scroll texts, paraphrases, commentaries, and reworkings,[2] there seems to be a single textual tradition preserved.[3] Furthermore, the first-century AD fragments (4:3 – 9 and 8:31 – 11:40) from Masada attest to a text (presumably brought from the Jerusalem temple by the Zealots) that is identical to the MT.[4] The LXX, as for the other prose sections of the Pentateuch, attests to a careful translation of a text similar to that behind the MT.

2. DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

Critical issues surrounding the date of the priestly material, comprising most of Leviticus, came to a focus in the late nineteenth-century with Julius Wellhausen,[5] who asserted a sixth- and fifth-century BC origin for Leviticus.

Based on evolutionary understandings of the processes of history, the scholarly community followed with one accord the assumption that this work represented a complex set of rituals that stood at the climax and end of the OT development of its faith. While recognizing possible preexilic antecedents in the Holiness source (chs. 17 – 26) and occasional early allusions elsewhere, the language and description was thought to betray a mid-first-millennium origin. But recent discoveries as well as a change in the philosophical approach have rightly called into question the assumptions of a postexilic date. Here are a few examples that argue for a second-millennium BC context:

1. The form of the tabernacle, as well as objects such as the lampstand, most closely resemble models from the West Semitic world of Ugarit as well as Hittite and Egyptian objects known only from the second millennium BC.[6]
2. Discussion of the ark, the Urim and Thummim, and the anointing oil appears in earlier texts and not at all in postexilic literature of the Bible.[7]
3. The language of Leviticus includes terms that do not occur in literature that is clearly postexilic. In some cases later literature used new vocabulary to replace earlier expressions occurring in Leviticus.[8]
4. Leviticus exhibits many parallels with texts of ancient Near Eastern culture. Most of these come from the Late Bronze Age (c. 1550 – 1200 BC), such as legal documents from Ugarit, Nuzi, Egypt, and the Middle Assyrian period. But no closer cultural milieu can be found than that of the Hittites of this period. Ritual, legal, administrative, and other texts exhibit parallels on all levels with Leviticus (cf. notes on 1:1, 4; 5:4, 15 – 16, 21, 27 [14, 20]; 8:2 – 35; 11; 12:2 – 8; 14:33 – 53; 16:1, 4, 8; 18:1 – 18, 22 – 23; 23:4; 24:8; 25:23; 26; 27:9 – 13). Thus the late second millennium BC remains the closest cultural environment for the traditions and institutions described in Leviticus.
5. In addition, the recent analysis of texts from the thirteenth-century BC West Semitic city of Emar reveals literary forms and cultic institutions not found anywhere else except in Leviticus: anointing the priest with oil and blood (8:30 – 35); seven-day priestly installation (ch. 9); use of fire on the last day of the installation (10:1); detailed formal and content parallels with the cultic calendar of Leviticus 23; and a special seven-year cycle (25:3 – 4).[9]

Despite obvious updating of the grammar and style of the text, a growing collection of multilevel parallels between Leviticus and the era of the fourteenth

and thirteenth centuries BC is emerging. This empirical evidence argues that the substance of Leviticus has an antiquity that reaches back to the earliest traditions of Israel as a nation.

There is a rabbinic tradition that attributions of Mosaic revelation (e.g., Lev 1:1) may be understood as oral law or even as a later development within the spirit of Moses. In particular Nehemiah 10, whose laws are not found in the Pentateuch and yet appear to be attributed to Moses (vv.30, 35 – 37), has been cited as an example of this.[10] But the comparative evidence regarding the material in Leviticus points to an ultimate origin for many details in the Mosaic era. Now, even more than a generation ago, it is possible to imagine a second-millennium BC origin for the call to holiness as defined by the book of Leviticus.

3. SCHOLARSHIP AND INTERPRETATION

(1) The publication of Wellhausen's *Prolegomena* in 1878 provided the intellectual basis for the critical position of the priestly material at the end of the development of the Pentateuch. This document included editorial insertions scattered throughout the first five books, dealing with creation (Ge 1:1 – 2:4a) as well as priestly and ritual laws. Leviticus was seen as written in the postexilic period in order to justify the priestly reconstruction program for the returnees to Jerusalem in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. The Holiness Code (Lev 17 – 26) was incorporated into the book though its origins dated from an earlier period.

Leviticus, in other words, represented the final stages of a development in Israelite religion that began with direct communication with God, was followed by intermediaries such as prophets, priests, and kings, and culminated in a complex religious cult that provided for all kinds of contingencies.

Scholars argued that this evolution of increasing complexity represented an accurate analysis of the history of Israelite religion. Thus, for many Protestant critics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, these intricacies of the Israelite cult as exemplified by Leviticus demonstrated a decadence of Jewish religion that Jesus Christ replaced with a faith not unlike that original to Israel.

With the foundation of the studies of Leviticus based on assumptions of a decadent set of rituals that developed late in Israel's history, it is not surprising that many of the most vibrant exegetical commentaries of Leviticus available to pastors through the middle of the twentieth century either predated this period[11] or were written by evangelicals who would not compromise the value of the literature with these assumptions. The former group represented a break with the longstanding use of allegory in the interpretation of the OT ritual (though preserving a strong Christological emphasis), while the latter were virtually nonexistent.

(2) The assumptions of critical scholarship began to be challenged with the publication of ancient Near Eastern temple and ritual records from Egypt and Mesopotamia. Both cultures demonstrated the presence of complex cultic rites in the second millennium BC that vitiated any argument that Israel's cult reflected a relatively late development of the first millennium.

Furthermore, the discovery and interpretation of Hittite texts from Anatolia, and Ugaritic rituals from that city on the Mediterranean coast of Syria, added evidence of religious rituals and laws that resembled Israel's on many levels. The fact that both of these civilizations ceased to exist well before 1000 BC terminated arguments of a late date for Levitical rituals as based on complexity. Indeed, given details of the extrabiblical texts, the monotheistic simplicity of ancient Israel provided a stark contrast. The biblical rituals appeared to take only the most basic forms with which peoples of that culture were familiar and to use them as a means/medium for communicating the eternal truths of God's desire to provide for a relationship with his people.

The late twentieth century saw the publication of the Emar material, also from a second millennium BC West Semitic culture, similar in many ways to ancient Israel's. From there, Akkadian texts of priestly installation and multi-month ritual calendars appeared — texts whose only parallels could be found in Leviticus (chs. 8 – 10; 23) or elsewhere in the Bible. The ongoing publication and study of all of this material has overturned many arguments used to presume an exilic/postexilic date for the biblical material.

One example may suffice. In Leviticus 8:30 the chief priest is anointed with oil and blood. Noth represents the traditional critical view that this act of

anointing passed to the high priest only in the postexilic period, when there was no longer a king but rather a priest as leader.[12] But the rite of anointing priestly figures with oil is attested already in thirteenth-century BC Emar.[13] The same is true with the anointing with blood. Certainly, studies of cultic texts at Emar and among the Hittites (and their Hurrian neighbors) — all of the second millennium BC — remain one of the most exciting new sources for a deeper appreciation of the great antiquity lying behind many of the texts of Leviticus.

(3) Along with the development of comparative studies as accessed through ancient Near Eastern texts and archaeology, there has been a concomitant emergence of interpretive models in the field of anthropology. More than perhaps anyone else working in this area, Mary Douglas has contributed significantly to the study of Leviticus. In several works she has sought to understand the essential components of the holy and sacred in ancient Israel.[14] Because they explain the structure of the biblical cult and rituals as presented in the text, her theories do not depend on a particular critical reconstruction of Leviticus. Some of these basic ideas are developed below under the theological theme of holiness.

Here it will suffice to provide the example of Leviticus 11. The principles by which Israelites could determine whether an animal was clean or unclean are clearly set forth in this text. But the reasons for the distinctions between these animals are never discussed in the Bible. Anthropological explanations have proven popular, particularly those elaborated by Douglas. Her earlier work developed the view that an animal's status was determined by its locomotion. Following Genesis 1 and the division of the world into three areas — land, water, and sky — it was concluded that clean animals use means of locomotion that correspond to the sphere of their existence: animals walk, fish swim, and birds fly.[15] Where there is another method of locomotion, and particularly where animals do not remain in one of the three spheres but cross from one area to another, the animal is unclean. Though this interpretation explains many animals, it does not explain them all.

Another approach is to declare as unclean those animals that eat dead creatures (and their blood)[16] and insects that bite or otherwise destroy the products of culture (as moths;[17] Douglas also relates as unclean animals whose appearance seems unbalanced or lacking[18]). Again, this does not explain all parts

of the classification.

More recently, Douglas discussed the distinction between unclean and abomination as used in Leviticus.[19] In particular, Leviticus 11 identifies the land animals as unclean (*ṭāmēʾ*, GK 3238) and those that "teem" or "swarm" in the sky and in the waters as an abomination (*šeqeṣ*, GK 9211). But as she notes, even in this text the terms are used interchangeably and Deuteronomy 14 clearly mixes them. Therefore, the distinction is not as important as the principle of God's protection of animal life. By forbidding not only the eating of these animals but also the touching of their carcasses, God has effectively declared any use of their bodies — for food or clothing or whatever — off limits to Israel. Especially the animals that swarm or teem have no place on Israel's menu. These symbolize the great (re)productivity of God's creation of life and their obedience to his command to multiply and increase. Instead, a restricted group of animals may serve as food. In particular, these are animals that sojourn with Israel and are designated as sacrificial substitutes for the people of the nation. They are fellow members of the covenantal community.

A comparative approach leads to similar conclusions. The Hittite laws also reveal a set of distinctions that include clean and unclean. As Harry Hoffner notes, the clean animals seem to be those that the Hittites were most familiar with, while the unclean animals are those that the Hittites knew and understood the least. This compares with the Israelite practice:

> In ancient Israelite law the "clean" land animals which were permitted for eating and sacrifice were the ox, the sheep and the goat, animals which had the longest history of domestic association with the early Israelites going back to their semi-nomadic period. The pig, being an animal normally kept by settled (non-nomadic peoples) appeared relatively late in Israelite domestic experience and was therefore never included among the "clean" animals. The horse and the camel also were relatively late entrants in the Israelite domesticated animal scene. We may apply somewhat the same logic to the Hittite animal world. Animals such as the ox, sheep and pig were kept by the Hittites and their ancestors long before the horse and mule were introduced.[20]

Thus one may conclude that the text of Genesis, with its division of land, sea, and air animals and its value of animals and their fruitfulness, forms a basis for the understanding of the clean/unclean distinctions in Leviticus 11.The value associated with animals meant that Israelites could never raise or hunt animals for their meat and body parts, except in the case of those animals that had remained a part of the nation of Israel since patriarchal times. Israel could kill

and eat them, but even there Leviticus closely associated the value of animals with their role as objects of sacrifice; that is, the Israelites valued more highly the animals they could offer to God in place of themselves for their sins.

(4) There has been a new focus on the study of biblical literature, viz., that of applying modern literary techniques of analysis to the biblical text. Though this may move in an almost limitless number of possible directions, there are four examples that have proven particularly effective and may be cited here.

The first is the study of linguistic terminology and style that began with the groundbreaking contributions of A. Hurvitz more than two decades ago.[21] There are terms in the priestly material of Leviticus that one would expect to find in Ezekiel and undoubtedly postexilic writings. But in Ezekiel these terms are missing and sometimes replaced with later expressions. The importance of this argument led Milgrom to introduce his multivolume commentary by citing this evidence and to date the first half of the book of Leviticus largely to the eighth century BC.[22]

Milgrom also followed Knohl in arguing that the Holiness source (chs. 17 – 26) should be dated about a century later.[23] Again, linguistic arguments were used to demonstrate how the holiness material represents a reworking and expansion of the vocabulary of priestly texts. While Knohl offered many arguments for this sequence, central to his analysis was the cultic calendar of Leviticus 23. The calendar is repeated five times in the Pentateuch but only here and in Numbers 28 – 29 in great detail. The latter is understood as a priestly source similar to Leviticus 1 – 16.This sort of repetition of Israel’s cultic calendar allowed critics to compare, contrast, and discuss development in a manner not found with other legal texts.

Leviticus 23:7 – 8 prescribes offerings but does not detail the contents. They appear in Numbers 28:19 – 24; therefore, it is logical to assume that the writer of Leviticus 23 must have been aware of the text of Numbers 28. Thus, with this undoubted example (among others), the conclusion that the Holiness source is chronologically subsequent to the priestly material (Lev 1 – 16) seems appropriate. Further, though the expansive nature of much vocabulary in the Holiness source may indicate a significant chronological gap between it and Leviticus 1 – 16, it may be more easily explained as a natural outcome of texts

that focus on the entire Israelite community rather than only on the sacrificial system.

Recent comparison with the only other West Semitic, multimonth cultic calendar — that of thirteenth-century BC Emar — has demonstrated parallels of structure and content that refute earlier critical assumptions about editorial duplication and insertion in this material of Leviticus.[24] If supposed duplications and insertions can be shown already to have existed as part of a single, integral, and similar text of the thirteenth century BC, what does this say about the literary history of Leviticus 23? If this unity occurs in the one text where it can be tested with an ancient Near Eastern parallel, what does this say about the application of the same methods of editorial dissection to other chapters in Leviticus? All assumptions deserve reexamination with a predisposition toward greater unity in the text as we now have it.

The second area of literary focus is Rainey's analysis of the sacrifices and their sequence in chs. 1 – 9. In the first section, Rainey calls 1:1 – 6:7 [5:26] a "handbook for priests."[25] However, it is clear from the text that the intended audience also includes laity.[26] Rainey observes that this section is made up of those sacrifices that provide a pleasing aroma (the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering; 1:3 – 3:17) followed by those that pertain to forgiveness of sin (the purification offering and the reparation offering; 4:1 – 6:7 [5:26]). In the first section the burnt offering is directed to God to express total dedication, while the grain offering is always associated with the burnt offering. In the second part, sins primarily against God are dealt with first (purification offering) and followed by those affecting other people (reparation offering). This is a useful explanation; however, it should be noted that 4:31 also describes the burning of a purification offering as an "aroma pleasing to the LORD." While this appears only once, it serves to link this offering with those of chs. 1 – 3 as well as to introduce the category of purification offerings in chs. 4 – 6.

In the second section (6:8[6:1] – 7:38), the order of sacrifices is identical to the order in the first six chapters, with one exception. The fellowship offering is reserved till last. Rainey has designated this order as administrative, in contrast to the first description of the sacrifices in Leviticus.[27] his structure is concerned with who receives the offerings and the relative frequency of the offerings. God

alone receives the burnt offering. The priests receive parts of the grain, purification, and reparation offerings. The offerers receive from the fellowship offering. This offering does not require any of the remainder of the sacrifice (that part not offered to the Lord) to be reserved for the priests. This is unlike the grain offering, the purification offering, and the reparation offering. Instead, as is noted in these chapters (but not in 1:3 – 6:7[5:26]), the offerer presents a gift of cakes to the priest. In terms of the frequency of the offerings, a comparison with Numbers 28 – 29 reveals that the burnt offerings outnumber the purification offerings. The third section (Lev. 8 – 9) deals with the actual sequence in which the sacrifices are presented in the ordination and in many other ceremonies.

A third area returns to the recent study of Douglas. She analyzes the book as a ring structure:[28]

Things and persons consecrated to the Lord (chs. 1 – 9)
The Holy Place defiled (ch. 10)
Blemish, leprosy (chs. 11 – 15)
Atonement for tabernacle (ch. 16) and summary (ch. 17)
Sex, Molech (ch. 18)
Mid-Turn: Equity between people (ch. 19)
Sex, Molech (ch. 20)
Blemish, leprosy (chs. 21 – 22)
Holy times, Day of Atonement (ch. 23)
The Name defiled (ch. 24)
Things and persons belonging to the Lord (ch. 25)
Ending: Equity between God and people (ch. 26; cf. ch. 19)
Latch: Redeeming things and persons consecrated or belonging to the Lord (ch. 27)

The fourth area is exemplified by Warning.[29] His method involves the identification of repetitive words and phrases in Leviticus. He counts their number of appearances and observes how they link sections together as well as the manner in which the seventh, twelfth, and other sequential occurrences of the terms highlight key thematic concerns. Though the work may overdo the tendency to count numbers of words, it repeatedly contributes additional support for the stylistic unity of the MT.

The cumulative weight of this analysis is impressive and calls into question many facile assumptions about the fragmentation of the text into multiple editorial hands. About eighteen examples are included in the commentary. Thus the literary analyses have followed the scholarly tendencies of recent decades in their appreciation of the literary unity of the text as well as the coherence of its

message.

4. THEOLOGY

Among the theological subjects these texts touch on, the concerns of sacrifice, sin, and holiness dominate. Salient features outlined here anticipate the more extensive treatment throughout the commentary.

Sacrifice

The origins of sacrifice remain a disputed topic. Certainly, the people of the ancient Near East understood as a primary purpose the placating of deities through feeding them with sacrificial meats and delicacies.[30] No such purpose served the Israelite God. Instead, sacrifices (and more generally offerings) provided a means of commitment of all that the people received as gifts from God (burnt and grain offerings). They provided access for the Israelites and their families to enjoy feasts and communion with God in a physical manner (fellowship offerings).

Antecedent and most important were the purification, reparation, and guilt offerings. The *purification offering* (*ḥaṭṭāʾt* [GK 2633], sometimes called a sin offering) removed impurities (ch. 4). Its manipulation of blood in the sanctuary suggests a concern with the reestablishment of a relationship between God and the offerer through removing the obstacles of wrongdoing. The *burnt offering* (*ʿōlâ*, GK 6592), which was entirely consumed on the altar, represented the most basic offering (ch. 1).While it provided for atonement (1:4; 16:25), the offerers' act of placing their hands on the victim probably signified their total dedication to God.[31] The *fellowship offering* (*šelāmîm*, GK 8968) required only the burning of the fat of the sacrificed animal. The meat was returned to the offerers, who could enjoy it as a meal before God (3:1 – 5; 1Sa 1:3 – 5). It was an occasion for a meat meal, celebrating communion with God. The sequence of purification, burnt, and fellowship offerings found in the ordination of the priests and the Day of Atonement rituals (chs. 8 – 9; 16) represents the essential order for the sinner's approach to God: repentance and forgiveness, (re-)dedication, and fellowship.

Thus Paul and the other apostolic apostolic writers of the New Testament letters based their understanding of the believer's salvation and life of discipleship on the significance and order of these sacrifices.

Sin

Gane has usefully outlined the expiatory sacrifices and the sins with which they deal.[32] The purification, reparation, and guilt offerings (chs. 4 – 7) could address four classes of wrongdoings: the ritual impurity (*ṭum'â*, GK 3240), the defiant sin (*peša'*, GK 7322), the nondefiant sin (*ḥaṭṭā't*, GK 2633), and the culpability resulting from sin (*'āwōn*, GK 6411). All occur in 16:16 because the Day of Atonement/Purification purges the first three from the sanctuary, removes the second, third, and fourth from the camp (16:21), and cleanses the people of nondefiant sin (16:30, 34). During the rest of the year, Leviticus 4 – 5 allows for the removal of impurity, nondefiant sin, and culpability from the people. The impurity of the sin transfers to the sanctuary just as the culpability is taken up by the priests (and the priests only — never the sanctuary). The Day of Atonement deals with these.

Gane denies any ritual means to address the defiant sin as far as its removal from the perpetrator. He notes that this sin includes only the worship of Molech (20:3) and nonrepentant corpse contamination (Nu 19:13, 20) in the legal materials. But God can forgive this sin (e.g., Ex 34:7; Nu 14:18; Pss 32:1: 51:3; 65:3[4]; Isa 43:25) directly by bearing it himself. The sacrificial system demonstrates God's justice in providing a means for dealing with sin and its guilt without denying it or showing favoritism. It demonstrates God's mercy insofar as the system exists and was instituted by God to maintain a relationship with his people despite their lapses. It demonstrates God's holiness, as God must provide a means by which to overcome the sin that separates him from his people.

Holiness

Holiness identifies a basic characteristic of God (10:3) that separates him from the world. In Leviticus God calls his people to holiness because he wants them to be like him (11:44 – 45; 19:2; 20:7 – 8); God makes his people holy (21:8, 15,

23; 22:9, 32). In order to teach his people about holiness, God designates offerings (2:3, 10; 6:17, 25, 29; 7:1, 6; 10:12, 17), places (6:16, 26 – 27, 30; 10:13; 16:2), people (6:18; 21:6 – 8), and objects (5:15 – 16) as holy. God commands the priests to distinguish what is holy and to teach this to the people (10:10). Holiness is taught to the people in terms of boundaries and divisions that provide a graded means of access to God.

Thus at the center of the community stood the Most Holy Place, where God resided and which only priests could approach. There the divine life provided fellowship and order to the people. Around that place was the camp where God's people resided — a place marked off itself as a holy place. Though not as strict in terms of regulations and access, chs. 17 – 27 called the people to particular life within it. Outside the community was the world of chaos and death. Here the scapegoat took the sins of the community once a year and here all that was unclean resided.

Corresponding to these three areas are three classes of people: priests, closest to God and called to the highest standards of holiness; Israelites, members of the covenantal community and called to a lesser (but no less important) standard of holiness; and the rest of the world's people, whose holiness is not a concern of Leviticus (cf. Ge 9), but who nevertheless must take on certain responsibilities of holiness if they live among the Israelites.

Corresponding to people is the animal world. It also comprises three classes: animals liable for sacrifice (chs. 1 – 10, 16); those who are clean and may be eaten (ch. 11); and those who are unclean. Thus holiness was taught in every area of life.

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6. OUTLINE

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15. See Douglas, *Purity and Danger*.

16. Jiøí Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11:*

Their Nature, Theology and Rationale (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2000).

17. See M. Carroll, "One More Time: Leviticus Revisited," in *Anthropological Approaches to the Old Testament*, ed B. Lang (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 117 – 26.

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26. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus* (WBC 4; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1992), 7.

27. Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices,” 487 – 93.

28. Douglas, “The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus,” 11; cf. also idem, *Leviticus as Literature*.

29. See Wilfried Warning, *Literary Artistry in Leviticus* (Biblical Interpretation Series 35; Leiden: Brill, 1999).

30. Rainey, “The Order of Sacrifices,” 495 – 99.

31. Gordon J. Wenham,“The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. R.T. Beckwith and M. J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 79 – 83.

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Text and Exposition

I. THE OFFERINGS (1:1 – 7:38)

OVERVIEW

The text moves through a description of each of the offerings: the burnt offering, the grain offering, the fellowship offering, the purification offering, and the reparation offering (1:3 – 6:7 [1:3 – 5:26]). Then follows what seems to be a repetition of each of these offerings (6:8 – 7:38 [6:1 – 7:38]). The best way to understand these two sets of descriptions is to see the perspectives from which they were written. The first set describes the offerings in more detail and especially considers the responsibilities of the person making the offering — the offerer. The second set of descriptions presumes and builds on the first set with some additional instructions regarding the tasks of the priests making the offerings.

This conclusion is not only apparent from the contents of the sets of instructions; it is also explicitly stated and repeated in each of the sections. Thus the sections for the people of Israel begin in 1:2 with, “Speak to the Israelites and say to them.” Leviticus 4:2 repeats the divine command to address all Israel. Note also the general instructions that begin the different offerings: 1:2, “When any of you”; 2:1, “When someone”; 3:1, “If someone’s”; 4:1, “When anyone”; 5:1 – 4, 17, “If a person”; 5:14, “When a person”; 6:1 [5:21] “If anyone.” In the second set of offering instructions, most of the offerings, and sometimes subsections of each description, are introduced by, “Give Aaron and his sons this command,” or a variation of the same (6:9, 14, 20, 25 [6:2, 7, 13, 18]).

The reparation offering is not introduced in this manner in the second set (7:1 – 2); but neither is it introduced like those in the first set. Only the fellowship offering is described in the second set of instructions in a similar manner as the first set (7:11b): “a person may present to the LORD.” However, the fellowship

offering is distinctive, as most of the activity involves the offerer and the Lord, without much intervention by or special provision for the priest. Further, the prohibitions of 7:22 – 27 are universal and apply to both priests and Israelites. Also, the discussion of the priests' share in 7:28 – 38 concerns the priests, but the regulations must be addressed to all Israel so that they know what to give to the priests from their offerings.

A. The Offerings from the People's Perspective (1:1 – 6:7 [1:1 – 5:26])

OVERVIEW

The style of this text and the sequence of the offerings have been compared to descriptive offering texts found in other contemporary cultures of the ancient Near East, especially Ugarit, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. For the order of these sacrifices, see the Introduction on "Scholarship and Interpretation."

1. Introduction and the Burnt Offering (1:1 – 17)

a. Introduction (1:1 – 2)

[1]The LORD called to Moses and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said, [2]"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.

COMMENTARY

1 The book begins with a standard narrative verbal form (*waw* consecutive plus imperfect). This suggests that the laws and regulations that follow are understood as part of the story of divine revelation of God's will to Moses on Mount Sinai. They form part of the historic context of the founding of God's

people. They also give this revelation an authority that cannot be questioned by anyone in Israel.

The first three words in the Hebrew text, “called to Moses,” are found in this sequence only at one other point in the OT — Exodus 24:16. There as well it is God who calls to Moses and introduces him to a series of cultic regulations for the construction of the tabernacle (Ex 25 – 30).This form is repeated at the beginning of Leviticus to introduce a second series of cultic laws. Now that the tabernacle has been built and all is in order, it is time to define the ceremonies that are to take place in the holy tent. This tent (lit., the “tent for meeting”) is named 146 times in the OT. Most occurrences are in the Pentateuch and Chronicles. It first appears in Exodus 27, where its construction is described in detail. Once built, it becomes the regular place at which God speaks with Moses.

2 The revelation of God is to be presented to Israel in oral form rather than as something that is written. The expression, “Speak to the Israelites,” occurs thirty-one times in Exodus through Numbers and only once elsewhere (Jos 20:2). Previously in Exodus, it was used of instructions that were to be carried out immediately rather than permanent legal injunctions. For example, Exodus 14:2, 15 uses the phrase in reference to Israel’s positioning of itself at the crossing of the Reed Sea. Its use here in Leviticus is surprising, as the regulations that follow are normally understood as permanent. But the expression recurs another thirteen times in Leviticus, often to introduce legislation. Perhaps it reflects the urgency of these laws. They are intended to provide immediate relief from sin and to restore fellowship with God.

The phrase “any of you” translates *ʾādām* the word for “people,” as in Genesis 1:26 – 28. The implication is that any Israelite who can understand the instructions, whether man or woman, is welcome to bring the offerings described in these chapters. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 145; Knierim, 14 – 16, who allow for a gender neutral *ʾādām* but err with the argument that only men would slaughter cattle.

The term for “offering” (*qorbān*, GK 7933) is the most general term and describes what is brought near (to God). It appears twice, at the beginning and end of this verse. Both times it occurs as the object of its cognate verb *qrb*, meaning, “to bring near.” This forms an envelope around the heart of the message that

describes the dedication and composition of the offering.

The dedication is to the Lord. Behind this lies the understanding that all the offerings in Leviticus are to be dedicated to Yahweh, the covenantal name of the God of Israel. The composition of the offering is from the livestock of Israel. This includes domesticated beasts that were used for their milk and wool and were occasionally eaten. The specification of "herd" (*bāqār*, GK 1330) and "flock" (*ṣō'n*, GK 7366) refers to larger and smaller livestock and is thereby inclusive of all the animals the Israelites herded.

Here then are the principal elements of that which is to be given to the Lord, whether in gratitude or as a means to restore fellowship. It is dedicated solely to the Lord and for no other purpose. It is brought by the one for whose benefit the sacrifice is made. It is taken from the property of the offerer. For the Christian, this anticipates the offering of Christ and the subsequent call to believers to offer themselves to God (Ro 12:1 – 2; cf. Rainey, 210; Hartley, 25; Rooker, 93, for association with the burnt offering). Thus Keil, 291, expresses it elegantly:

> If the burning and sending up in the altar-fire shadowed forth the self-surrender of the offerer to the purifying fire of the Holy Ghost .. . the burnt-offering was an embodiment of the idea of the consecration and self-surrender of the whole man to the Lord, to be pervaded by the refining and sanctifying power of divine grace.

NOTES

1 C. R. Smith ("The Literary Structure of Leviticus," *JSOT* 70 [1996]: 17 – 32) observes that only in Leviticus 1:1 and Numbers 1:1 does the Bible relate that God spoke to Moses at the Tent of Meeting. This expression "bookends" Leviticus, separating it from what precedes (Exodus) and from what follows (Numbers).

Tents for religious purposes are attested in Hittite texts from 1400 – 1200 BC, in seventeenth-century BC texts from Mari, and in Ugarit as the home of the Ugaritic chief deity, El, who meets there with the assembly of the gods (*puḫru mō'idi*, "assembly of meeting"; note the resemblance to *mō'ēd*, "meeting" [GK 4595], in "Tent of Meeting"). See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 139 – 42.

Rolf Rendtorff ("Is It Possible to Read Leviticus as a Separate Book?" in *Reading Leviticus*: *A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. J. F. A. Sawyer [JSOTSup 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996]: 26 – 27) and Rolf Knierim ("The Composition of the Pentateuch," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1985 Seminar Papers* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1985], 405) have adduced this verse as at the center of the structure of the Sinai revelation, between the revelation from Mount Sinai itself (Ex 19 – 40) and the revelation from the Tent of Meeting (Lev 1:1 – Nu 10:10). This text lies at the heart of the Pentateuch. See also Warning, 37.

2 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 143 – 44) notes how different this is from the rituals of Mesopotamia and Egypt, where the knowledge of the form of the ceremonies was kept secret from the commoners and known only to the priests. This contrasts with the Israelite sacrifices, the details of which were to be made known to all believers.

b. The burnt offering (1:3 – 17)

OVERVIEW

The presentation of the burnt offering naturally divides into three parts: the offering of the cattle in vv.3 – 9, the offering of the sheep and goats in vv.10 – 13, and the offering of birds in vv.14 – 17. The first two parts share nine distinct elements, while the third part includes six or seven of these.

Burnt Offering

Elements	Cattle	Sheep/Goats	Birds
1a Condition of offerer making	3 If the offering is a burnt	10 If the offering is a burnt offering	14 If the offering to the LORD is a

offering	offering from the herd,	from the flock,	burnt offering of birds,
1b Specification		from either the sheep or the goats,	he is to offer a dove or a young pigeon.
2 Quality	he is to offer a male without defect.	he is to offer a male without defect.	
3 Presentation	He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD.		
4 Slaughtering	4 He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5 He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD,	11 He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD,	15 The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off the head and burn it on the altar;
5 Manipulation of blood	and then Aaron’s sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.	and Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.	its blood shall be drained out on the side of the altar.
6 Cutting in pieces	6 He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces.	12 He is to cut it into pieces,	17 He shall tear it open by the wings, not severing it completely,
7 Arrangement	7 The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. 8 Then Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat,	and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the	

	on the burning wood that is on the altar	burning wood that is on the altar.	
8 Washing	9 He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water,	13 He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water,	[16a He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east side of the altar, where the ashes are.]
9 Burning	and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar.	and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar.	16b and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that is on the fire on the altar.
10 Pleasing aroma	It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.	It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.	It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

There is no direct correspondence to the washing (number 8) for the birds. But the ritual is one of cleansing and that corresponds to the cropping of the bird. This occurs in v.16, before number 6, the tearing of the wings, which appears in v.17.

i. The offering of cattle (1:3 – 9)

3“ ‘If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he is to offer a male without defect. He must present it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD. 4He is to lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, and it will be accepted on his behalf to make atonement for him. 5He is to slaughter the young bull before the LORD, and then

Aaron’s sons the priests shall bring the blood and sprinkle it against the altar on all sides at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. [6]He is to skin the burnt offering and cut it into pieces. [7]The sons of Aaron the priest are to put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. [8]Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. [9]He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

3 The burnt offering is a term whose root '*lh* (GK 6590) means “to ascend.” The high frequency of the offering, performed at least twice daily (Nu 28) and at important occasions (Rooker, 85), as well as the great antiquity of the offering (see below), gives it first place in the list of sacrifices. Thus a primary element of this offering is related to the rising of the offering from the person offering it to the presence of God.

But the description of the offering and its function must determine the true meaning of the offering, as etymological discussions may have no necessary relevance to the meaning of the ceremony in Israel’s day. Nevertheless, the root behind the term for the offering (“to ascend”) provides a clue to the purpose and direction of the sacrificial ceremony. The offerer ascends to Jerusalem, ascends to the temple, causes the animal to be brought up, places his hand on (using the similar sounding preposition '*al*) the animal, and places the pieces of the carcass on the altar (same preposition). The priest causes the animal to ascend in the fire as the latter transforms the sacrifice to smoke that ascends to God (Knierim, 83 – 85).

This verse is structured according to case law as found previously in the Book of the Covenant (Ex 20:22 – 23:33). That is, it begins with a condition, introduced by “if . . . ” (called the protasis), and is followed by a consequence, often (though not here) introduced in English by “then . . .” (called the apodosis). Here there is a single protasis that designates the bringing of a burnt offering.

The apodosis, however, is made up of several parts. The first indicates that it is to be a steer taken “from the herd” and “without defect.” This expression occurs only here, though “without defect” is used to describe male sheep and goats in v.10. Prior to Leviticus this term (*tāmîm*, GK 9447) occurs only four times to describe (1) the righteous ness of Noah (Ge 6:9), (2) how God wished Abram to

act in his presence (Ge 17:1), (3) the quality of the sheep chosen for the first Passover (Ex 12:5), and (4) the animals used for the consecration of the priests (Ex 29:1).Thus it describes moral virtue and obedience in people and a corresponding physical appearance of wholeness in animals chosen for sacrifice.

The note that the animal is to be a male is significant because some other offerings, such as the fellowship offering, allow either a male or a female (3:1).Though this may reflect the patriarchal nature of the society, such is not proven in this instance. In fact, no explicit reason is given (but note Wenham, 55, who argues that male animals were more valued than female ones). From a practical standpoint, the sacrifice of males from the flock in fact reduces the least important members of the herd, for the females were necessary for breeding. Most of the males were unnecessary and took up valuable grazing land. (In modern sheep and cattle farming the minimum number of males to females is one to sixty.) This encouraged the sacrifice of males.

For all Israel, this fact bears testimony to God's gracious provision that the sacrifice, while a significant and costly gift, remains accessible to a maximum number of Israelites, who could use animals that would be otherwise expendable. (See Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1508, who cites a personal communication with Mary Douglas.)

The second part of the apodosis specifies the place chosen for the sacrifice as the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. This is as close as anyone could come to God's presence without receiving the special permission necessary to enter the Tent of Meeting.

The final phrase registers the result of the burnt offering: reconciliation with the Lord. The single earlier use of this expression in the Pentateuch was in describing the seal on the priest's forehead that was to bear the guilt of the people's offerings so that they would be "acceptable to the LORD" (Ex 28:38). Thus the reader learns that reconciliation with God involves the offering of a whole, living creature without defect.

4 The act of placing one's hand on the victim symbolizes the significance of the substitutionary capacity of the animal, which is killed in place of the offerer. That the head is chosen for the positioning of the hand suggests that area most

important and necessary for life. For people, the head and especially the face is the place of identification. Perhaps this further recognizes the identification made between the person sacrificing and the animal to be killed.

The second half of this verse is key for understanding this and other sacrifices. Here a purpose of the burnt offering is outlined: to make atonement for the offerer. The term "to make atonement" (*kappēr*, GK 4105) becomes rich with theological significance and debate (see Notes). But its occurrences in Genesis and Exodus are relatively few and provide a larger background to the usage here.

The Qal stem of *kpr* occurs in Genesis 32:20, where Jacob hopes to buy off his brother's anger with presents. A nominal form appears in Exodus 21:30, where it describes a ransom that must be paid by the guilty person to receive his life back. The verbal and nominal forms appear seven times in Exodus 29 and 30, where they refer to atonement made for the altar and for each of the Israelites numbered in a census. Finally, in Exodus 32:30 Moses informs the people that he will try to make atonement for them before God after the golden calf incident. Thus the sense of atonement before God involves appeasing divine anger for disobedience of some sort. In this case it is done not with money but with the life of a sacrificial victim.

Thus, while *kpr* may describe a transfer of property from one individual to another in order to compensate for an offense (see Brichto), such a meaning does not exhaust the verb's use. For the Christian, the reality of Christ's death on the cross becomes the means by which the wrath of God is overcome (Ro 5:9). As with the daily sacrifices of the burnt offering, so the Christian believer should regularly reflect and confess sins before God (1Jn 1:9; Rooker, 93).

As already noted, the instructions contained in the second half of v.3 and all of v.4 are not repeated in the directions for the sheep and goats nor for the birds. Yet these statements form the key to understanding the burnt offering. Surely the element of substitutionary atonement is available for the burnt offerings performed with the other animals. The absence of these instructions with the other animals may be a stylistic variation. Their place at the head of the first group of animals suggests a special significance; their absence from the later animals does not deny their essential requirement for the ritual but rather looks back to and assumes it. (See also the discussion at v.7.)

Though atonement is more directly related to the purification offerings of Leviticus 4 – 5, it is introduced here at the head of all the sacrifices to stress the important role of atonement in the performance of the whole collection. The full sense of the redemption achieved through the atonement for all Israel is not realized in the burnt offering or any other single offering. Instead, as will be seen, it requires the removal of impurities effected by the purification offering, as well as the dedication of the burnt offering and the full restoration to fellowship and joy as realized in the fellowship and grain offerings.

5 The instructions continue as the offerer slaughters the calf (the term identifies a young animal, perhaps a year old; cf. 9:6; Budd, 48) before the Lord, i.e., at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Thus the sacrifice is made by the offerer and not initially by the priests. This explains the slaughtering of the animal and its symbolic significance as a substitution for the offerer. The animal's death takes the place of the death of the offerer, and the animal's unblemished state allows it to die in place of the blemished nature of the sinful offerer. As Wenham, 55, notes, the sacrifice required the full participation of the offerer. This is no spectator worship, and the concern of biblical worship is to draw the worshiper into full participation in the cult. For the Christian the details of worship may have changed, but this concern has not.

At this point the instructions change their verbal forms from singular to plural. This change is introduced by the presence of the subject, "the sons of Aaron." This term describes the generation after Aaron, but it also anticipates all priests in Israel who could be so designated. The first action of the priests parallels that of the offerer in v.3. In both instances they bring something. The offerer brings the animal for sacrifice at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. The priests bring the blood of the animal and sprinkle it against the altar at the same place — the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. This act of sprinkling the blood prepares the altar for the offering itself and recognizes that the blood belongs to God (Ge 9:4 – 5) by placing it at the altar, the place where God is present (Noth, 23). In this sense it is distinct from the main part of the offering, and yet it forms the necessary prelude to the burnt offering by rendering the altar fit for the act of offering up the sacrifice.

6 The skinning of the sacrifice removes what cannot be eaten from the more

valuable part of the animal that is fit for consumption. The cutting of the offering into pieces further prepares it as a meal. Of course no one will eat this animal, but it will be offered as a sacrifice, and the sacrificial nature of the slaughter symbolizes giving the life and the best part of the animal to God. It is therefore prepared in the same way as though it were being offered to a king or someone else who would be served a meal of meat. The cutting into pieces was done whenever such a meal was prepared (Eze 24:1 – 6).

7 The lighting of the altar and the placement of kindling on it are part of the process for preparing the altar for its role in the burnt offering. The altar is mentioned four times in Leviticus, always as part of the burnt offering (also 1:8; 1:12; 6:12; cf. 1Ki 18:33; Isa 30:33). Further, this word occurs previously only with the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:9. Not only does this identify that sacrifice as a burnt offering, but it also illustrates the extraordinary importance of the burnt offering. When Isaac, Abraham's "only son" (Ge 22;1), was placed on that ancient altar, it was all Israel that was ready to be sacrificed in obedience to God. God's gracious provision of a ram provided a substitute so that Abraham could still enjoy fellowship with God and yet not lose the heir through whom the promised people would come.

Like vv.3b – 4, v.7 does not appear in the descriptions of the other animals that may be sacrificed in the burnt offering. Again, the need to light the fire and arrange the kindling is essential for all the sacrifices. As with vv.3b – 4 this may be presumed, and so repetition was deemed unnecessary.

8 The grouping of these parts of the animal —the head, pieces (of meat), and fat — is found only in sacrificial texts and only in descriptions of the burnt offering (1:12; 8:20).These are the best parts of the animal and the most desired for food. They become a description of the whole animal when it is prepared for the burnt offering. Here the principle of biblical sacrifice is implied. It is that God has given his people all good gifts and blessings of creation but asks that they return to him a token of his gifts in acknowledgment that he is the source of everything (Ps 24; Ro 12:1 – 2).

Verses 7 – 9 each describe the altar as the place of sacrifice. Verse 8 provides the most detailed description of all: "on the burning wood that is on the altar." The threefold description emphasizes the importance of the altar, chosen and

prepared exactly according to divine wish (cf. ch. 10). In a simple chiastic structure they focus on v.8, where the most complete picture of the burnt offering is given: all the pieces of the properly chosen and prepared animal resting on top of the burning wood of the altar.

9 The remaining parts of the animal — the organs and interior parts and the legs — are described at this point. Even the organs that eliminate waste and the hooves that walk in the dirt are included because the burnt offering requires that the whole of the animal be given up to God and nothing be held back. Therefore, they are washed clean of their impurities and placed on the altar so that they may be consumed.

The “pleasing aroma” that the sacrifice gives to the Lord is the common response for divine acceptance of the offering. It occurs forty-three times but mainly in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel (and once in Ge 8:21). It is found only in sacrificial contexts or imagery. It is not limited to the Lord, as other gods can also receive a pleasing aroma (Eze 6:13; 16:19; 20:28). It will also describe Israel’s return after their deportation to other nations (Eze 20:41).

The aroma is not to be understood as some sort of bribe toward God, as it sometimes came to be understood in neighboring cultures. It is not that the God of Israel depends on mortals for food or that God is enticed by such sacrifices to do the bidding of the offerers. In fact, as Leviticus 26:31 will demonstrate, no amount of “pleasing aroma” can substitute for faithfulness, nor can it prevent God’s judgment for disobedience to the covenant. Instead, the term is best understood as a means of signifying the offerer’s desire for God’s gracious acceptance of the sacrifice and its fulfillment of the purpose for which it was given.

That purpose is summarized by Knierim, 67 – 82, as pleasing and appeasing God. In fact, the wide-ranging collection of possible purposes for the burnt offering demonstrate that it serves not only as atonement for sin but also addresses other concerns of restoring, maintaining, and enhancing Israel’s relationship with God.

NOTES

3 Warning, 161 – 62, notes that the term *lᵉrāṣôn*, "so that (it) will be acceptable" (GK 8356), occurs seven times in Leviticus. For the first time (here) and the last time (23:11), it appears with the phrase *lipᶜnê* ("before the LORD") alongside it. This stresses the value of both the burnt offering and the elevation offering (23:11) in the presence of God.

4 Knierim (*Text and Concept*, 39) understands the placement of the hand on the animal as an act of surrendering it to death. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 151 – 53) compares Hittite and Akkadian expressions and actions of placing the hand on the sacrifice to argue that the fundamental idea is one of ownership. While this is true, it does not exclude the sense of substitution. Because the sacrificial victim cannot speak for itself, ownership must be established for substitution to take place. The owner can choose the purpose of the sacrifice.

Wenham, 62, includes as the purpose of laying on the hands both substitution and the transferral of sins. The latter is explicit in 16:21. Having noted this, it is also true that the offerer lays a hand on the fellowship offering. This can hardly be considered an act of substitution or transferral (Hartley, 20 – 21). So while ownership as the purpose of the laying on of hands is the only element shared by all of these sacrifices, it remains possible that specific sacrifices made different uses of this procedure (cf. Budd, 48).

This verse continues the instructions of the ceremony that were begun in the preceding verse. In effect, this and the following verses define the apodosis of the legal form. But this form is now modified in order to describe the ritual. It continues the volitional jussives of v.3 with perfect verbs with a *waw* consecutive in front of them. This furthers the jussive force of the clauses and renders the whole description as a set of instructions for the performance of the ceremony of the burnt offering.

The mention of atonement provides a summary of an important purpose of all the sacrifices taken together. But the association of atonement with the burnt offering also demonstrates the great antiquity of this sacrifice and its precedence before other animal sacrifices that are introduced in Leviticus for specific purposes of atonement. The purification offering and the reparation offering are illustrations of later offerings because of the specifics regarding cases and

purposes for bringing these offerings.

Cognates to the burnt offering are found among the Hittites and Ugaritians of the second millennium BC and occur in early texts (Ge 8:20; 22:2, 7 – 8, 13; Ex 10:25; 18:12; Nu 23:15; Jdg 6:26; 13:16; 20:26; see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 172 – 77; Budd, 44). For the Hebrew term, some point to an Arabic cognate with the meaning of "covering over," whereas others see a similar word in Akkadian with the meaning "wipe off " or "render pure" (Budd, 88; Baruch Levine, *In the Presence of the Lord: A Study of Cult and Some Cultic Terms in Israel* [Leiden: Brill, 1974]); others reject all cognates and focus on the other biblical occurrences with the sense of a payment for what is due (see Brichto, "On Slaughter").

The purification offering focuses on the removal of impurity from the sanctuary but also the bearing of guilt (Kiuchi, 100 – 101). The burnt offering has no such restriction. It removes sin from the offerer (Wenham, 58 – 59). Thus it serves a purpose that cannot be compared to a deity's arbitrary demand for tribute (Gerstenberger, 35). The burnt offering serves the needs of the offerer, not those of God.

7 This verse mentions Aaron for the first time in the book. The name of Aaron is disputed as to its origin and meaning. Some have attempted to analyze it as West Semitic, deriving from a root meaning "to give light" (*,wr*, GK 239) and including a suffix, though this has recognized difficulties. See R. Zadok, *The Pre-Hellenistic Israelite Anthroponymy and Prosopography* (OLA 28; Leuven: Peeters, 1988), 102, where he also recognizes the problem with the *-h-* in the middle of the root. Zadok compares "Abram" and "Abraham," but this is unsatisfactory until more parallels appear and a better understanding of the name "Abraham" becomes available.

In the context of Aaron's background in Egypt and the presence of other Egyptian names in the wilderness generation of Israel, an Egyptian etymology such as *0,rn*, "the name (of God) is great," is preferred if not certain (KB 1:19). See Frank Yurco, "Merneptah's Canaanite Campaign and Israel's Origins," 27 – 55, in *Exodus*: *The Egyptian Evidence*, ed. E. S. Frerichs and L. H. Lesko (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 46 – 47. He cites "Moses," "Phineas," "Hophni," "Shiprah," and "Puah"as examples of Egyptian names that are

characteristic of the Ramesside era of the thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC. They are found less frequently in the earlier eighteenth dynasty and rarely in the later twenty-sixth dynasty.

8 The term “fat” occurs only here and in 1:12 and 8:20. It is often understood as the suet or hard fat associated with the kidney.

9 The act of washing the entrails and the legs relates to the cleansing of the animal from its own excrement; in addition, washing the legs (which are not skinned) cleanses them from impurities contracted from contact with the ground. The main trunk of the animal’s body was skinned and perhaps placed on the skin itself so that it did not come in contact with any dirt (Knierim, 55, n. 57).

The term “bring” translates the Hebrew *hiqt.îr* (GK 7787). This term is used for sacrificial burning and occurs some eleven times in Leviticus (1:9, 13, 17; 2:16; 3:5, 11, 16; 4:10, 26, 31, 35). According to Douglas, 68 – 69, it describes the transformation of the offering from one substance (food) to another (smoke). Rather than being destroyed, the offering is made ready for divine reception.

The “offering made by fire” translates the Hebrew *ʾiššēh* — a term thought by some to relate to the Hebrew *ʾēš* (“fire,” GK 836). However, as Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 161 – 62) observes, the wine libation of Numbers 15:10 is not burnt but is called an *ʾiššēh* . This is also true of the bread of display (Lev 24:7, 9). Therefore, it is better to derive this term from the Ugaritic *ʾitt,* “food gift” (and possibly Akkadian *eššešu*) and to understand its use here and throughout Leviticus as unrelated to fire. Other appearances of *ʾiššēh* occur in apposition to the Hebrew *leḥem,* “food, bread” (GK 4312; see 3:11, 16; 21:6; Nu 28:2, 24; see Hartley, 14).

For the use of “pleasing aroma,” compare especially God’s reaction to Noah’s sacrifice after the flood, when God smells the odor and promises never again to curse the ground in such a manner (Ge 8:21), and the reaction of the gods to Utnapishtim’s sacrifice after the flood as described in the Gilgamesh Epic. While the similarities of these accounts have been noted, it is important to understand the Hebrew expression in the light of its full use in sacrificial contexts throughout the biblical texts (and especially the Pentateuch).

REFLECTION

The sacrifice of an offering to God with the expectation of divine fellowship occurs in the NT for the Christian. Christ provided the substitutionary atonement in the place of all Christians. He died in our place, and yet his resurrected life continues not only in the form of his resurrected body in heaven but also through the continuation of the Spirit-enlivened body of Christ, which is the church on earth (Jn 16:7; Eph 2:16; Php 2:5 – 11). In the OT the means of this sacrifice was the altar. In the NT this becomes the cross on which Christ died (cf. Heb 13:10 – 12).

ii. The offering of sheep and goats (1:10 – 13)

> 10“ ‘If the offering is a burnt offering from the flock, from either the sheep or the goats, he is to offer a male without defect. 11He is to slaughter it at the north side of the altar before the LORD, and Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 12He is to cut it into pieces, and the priest shall arrange them, including the head and the fat, on the burning wood that is on the altar. 13He is to wash the inner parts and the legs with water, and the priest is to bring all of it and burn it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

COMMENTARY

10 – 13 These verses repeat in almost all of their phrases material already found in the offering of the cattle in vv.3 – 9. There are two significant differences: sheep and goats are used in place of cattle, and they are slaughtered at the north side of the altar.

The use of sheep and goats is typical of sacrifices in Israel that are of lesser value than the larger cattle. All of these animals formed an essential part of the pastoral lifestyle characteristic of early Israel; therefore, the animals reflect the culture of Israel. This is one example of God’s creation of a sacrificial system for Israel that was both accessible to the average citizen and understandable in the

light of sacrifice in the ancient world. Thus the sacrifices of ancient Israel are part of Paul's goal of becoming all things to reach everyone (1Co 9:22). But they are also a transformed "medium" in which the distinctives of faith in Israel's God remain uncompromised (Gal 1:9; 1Co 10:23).

The significance of the north side of the altar is difficult to determine. The only other reference to the north side of the altar occurs in the account of King Ahaz's syncretism with the Assyrian religion; he removed the bronze altar and placed it on the north side of his own improvised altar (2Ki 6:14). This may suggest a place of disgrace. Alternatively, it may suggest a place of honor next only to Ahaz's own altar.

Elsewhere the north side of the tabernacle is the location for the table of bread before God's presence (Ex 40:22). Numbers 3:35 locates some families (those responsible for the care of various implements in the tabernacle) to the north of the tabernacle. Hartley, 23, notes, "The Tent opened to the east, the wash basin was on the west, and the ascent to the altar was to the south. Thus the north was the logical place." Perhaps the sacrificed animals' smaller stature (as compared to cattle) required that the sacrifice be made on one part of the larger altar. Facing the ark of the covenant, the offerer and the priests would recognize the north side of the altar to be to the right of the symbolic presence of God. Traditionally, the right side is the place of honor — a view that continued into NT times (e.g., Mt 25:34; 26:64).

iii.The offering of the birds (1:14 – 17)

> 14" 'If the offering to the LORD is a burnt offering of birds, he is to offer
> a dove or a young pigeon. 15The priest shall bring it to the altar, wring off
> the head and burn it on the altar; its blood shall be drained out on the side of
> the altar. 16He is to remove the crop with its contents and throw it to the east
> side of the altar, where the ashes are. 17He shall tear it open by the wings,
> not severing it completely, and then the priest shall burn it on the wood that
> is on the fire on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an
> aroma pleasing to the LORD.

COMMENTARY

14, **17** The choice of pigeons and doves occurs frequently in Leviticus for minor sacrifices or ones where the offerer cannot afford a more costly animal (5:7, 11; 12:6, 8; 14:22, 30; 15:14, 29). Earlier in the Pentateuch these two animals are grouped together only once — in Genesis 15:9, where God establishes his covenant with Abram and promises him land. The practice of slaying an animal as part of an oath was widely established in land grants (see R. S. Hess, "The Slaughter of the Animals in Genesis 15:18 – 21 and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context," in *He Swore an Oath*: *Biblical Themes from Genesis 12 – 50*, 2nd ed., ed. R. S. Hess et al. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994], 55 – 65). In Leviticus it is part of the burnt offering. But these two birds form a sacrifice offered to God in both texts.

The connection does not stop there. In Genesis 15:10 the other animals are cut into pieces, but not the birds. They are killed but offered without being divided. The same is true of the burnt offering as described in Leviticus 1:17. The indivisibility of the birds no doubt reflects their small size in comparison with the other animals. The tearing of the wings may symbolize the inability of the bird to fly. Just as the legs are mentioned for the previous animals, the mention of the wings suggests the primary means of locomotion for the birds. By cleaving the wings, the birds lose this aspect of their life. For the Christian, this is a further illustration as to how the surrender of all that one has and prizes in life is part of the sacrifice to God by which the disciple truly walks in the footsteps of his master, Jesus Christ, who also gave up his life (Lk 14:26 – 27; Ro 5:6 – 8).

15 The small nature of the animal explains the distinctive way in which it is to die, viz., by the wringing of its neck. It also explains why there is no text on the arrangement of the pieces of the animal on the altar, and it may suggest why there is no explicit demand for an animal without blemish. Both items appear with respect to the burnt offerings of cattle and sheep. Further, the flow of the blood on the side of the altar replaces the sprinkling of blood on the altar. Again, perhaps the small size of the birds would not allow for sufficient blood to sprinkle over the whole altar. The drainage of the blood on the side of the altar would symbolize the covering of the whole altar.

The Israelite sanctuary discovered at Arad incorporated an altar (of burnt offering?) with a drainage channel on top (Wright, 158). Nearby cultures have also revealed drainage ditches for the removal of blood and other fluids. A good example is the thirteenth-century BC sanctuary in the Timnah Valley in the Negev. A drainage ditch is clearly evident there beside the place where blood sacrifices were offered.

16 This is a most unusual verse, given the structure noted in the previous two types of animal sacrifices. If it is an alternative to the washing or purification of the animal, it belongs after the first part of v.17, where the tearing of the animal is described. The crop is related to the contents. The latter may be “feathers” but is uncertain, as it only occurs here. If it is, then this is related to the skinning of the cattle that are offered in v.6. There the act of flaying precedes the arrangement of the pieces on the altar, just as here it comes before the wings are torn. In this understanding the sequence is consistent and preserved through all three types of animals.

The area east of the altar would be the most fitting place for the ashes, where they were to be stored in pots (Ex 27:3), presumably until they could be taken outside the camp to a clean place (Lev 4:12). East of the altar would be the side farthest away from the Most Holy Place and therefore the location where the ashes could be immediately placed — the location least likely to defile the holy presence of God. This review of the details surrounding the proper worship of God recalls the admonition of Paul that Christian worship should be performed with propriety (1Co 14:40).

Though the burnt offering is used for a variety of purposes, its goal to provide reconciliation between the sinner and God is the key. There are three points of special note. First, the animal substitutes for the sinner as the latter transfers to the sacrificial animal the guilt of the sin that demands a life in payment. Second, the animal’s own innocent blood provides the purification necessary for God’s holiness to approach and accept the life of this victim for the sin. Third, the burning of the animal provides an offering that is pleasing to God. The death of the animal ends the judgment against the sinner. The sweet aroma of the tastiest parts of the animal symbolizes the desire for God’s pleasure with the sacrifice and the restoration of fellowship between the offerer and the Lord.

REFLECTION

The burnt offering appears in the NT in two quotations of the OT (see Mk 12:33; Heb 10:6 – 8). Nowhere in the NT is the sacrifice of Jesus Christ more closely related to the OT burnt offering than in the letter to the Hebrews. The death of Jesus Christ provided the perfect sacrifice that brought about the complete eradication of sin and the fullness of life with God for the believer (Heb 9:11 – 22). Christ's single offering of his body on the cross provided a burnt offering that has permanently taken away sin so that the offering need not be repeated (Heb 9:23 – 10:18).

2. The Grain Offering (2:1 – 16)

OVERVIEW

Leviticus 2 provides a detailed analysis of the various types of non-meat offerings, called by the general name of *minḥâ* or "grain offering" (GK 4966). Here also is included the offering of first-fruits (vv.12 – 14). While most of the text deals with the possible methods of preparing the grain offering, its history and significance begin with the offerings of Cain and Abel, both of which are designated as *minḥâ*. Thus it appears that this offering could be of either meat or grain. Indeed, the term appears originally to have had the broadest connotation of any gift that one person gives to another. For example, this word describes the gift that Jacob prepared for Esau in order to assuage his anger (Ge 32:13 – 33:10).

Like the burnt offering, little is said regarding the purpose of the grain offering. Nevertheless, both are assumed and their importance is highlighted by the fact that they head the list of offerings. Both of these offerings appear to be the most general of sacrifices to God, covering both animal and vegetable kingdoms. Both are part of the regular sacrificial cult.

Burnt offerings and grain offerings were made at the consecration of Aaron and his family to the priesthood (Ex 29:1 – 46), and both are to be offered to the

Lord daily, morning and evening (Nu 28). But both also assume that the offerers are not just priests but any and every citizen of Israel. If the burnt offering describes a total dedication to God with a desire to make atonement (1:4) and so to restore fellowship, the grain offering is a gift of gratitude to God for his physical blessings in providing the staples of the Israelite diet — barley and wheat (as well as fruit). It is an invocation of God in order to call to his mind the blessings he has given to Israel and to express appreciation for them (2:2, 9, 16).

In this sense, Wenham, 69, and Levine, 9, may be correct to understand the grain offering as a kind of tribute to God. Thus the grain offering involves giving back to God a portion of what God has given to Israel, and it represents a dedication to God of their labor to obtain food (Kellogg, 68 – 70). The burnt and grain offerings together represent two basic elements of the offerer's concerns before God: to restore and maintain one's relationship with God and to express thanks and praise for God-given blessings (cf. Hartley, 29 – 30).

a. The offering of uncooked grain (2:1 – 3)

> 1" 'When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD, his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it 2and take it to Aaron's sons the priests. The priest shall take a handful of the fine flour and oil, together with all the incense, and burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. 3The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

COMMENTARY

1 Chapter 2 begins with a familiar conditional clause in which the protasis names the offering and the subsequent clauses (apodosis) detail how it is to be offered (see comment on 1:4 – 5). Unlike ch. 1, however, this clause does not begin with "if " but with a word that can be translated "spirit" (*nepeš*, GK 5883). Though this word can refer to the basic vitality of a person and the desire for life, it can also simply refer to a person and substitute for a pronoun. That is most likely the case here, where it should be translated as "anyone."

The grain offering is composed of three elements: “fine flour,” “oil,” and “incense.” The “fine flour” is the best of flour, whether wheat or barley. It is the flour that Sarah used to make cakes for the special visitors in Genesis 18:6. It is the essence of the grain offering.

The “oil” (i.e., olive oil) is poured rather than mixed. Similar pouring of oil occurs in the anointing of priests (Ex 29:7; Lev 8:12; 21:10) and kings (1Sa 10:1; 2Ki 9:3, 6). In every case it is associated with the verb “to anoint” (*mšḥ*, GK 5417*)*. This is the root of the word “Messiah” (lit., “anointed one”). Thus the pouring of the oil on the bread has the significance of setting it aside to the Lord for a special purpose.

Finally, “incense” is placed on it. Literally, this is the frankincense spice (*lebônâ*, GK 4247). The term occurred once earlier in the Pentateuch. In Exodus 30:34 it describes the making of a special incense only used in and around the tabernacle. Frankincense is one of the four spices used.

“Fine flour” describes the best of ingredients for the choicest of baked goods. The “oil” that is poured suggests a special consecration of the cakes to God. The addition of incense describes its great value and fragrance. Thus the grain offering expresses gratitude, praise, or special offering to God. Its dedication and fragrance symbolize the customary joy, gratitude, and worship contexts in which the offering is made.

This truth is suggested by the command to omit the oil and frankincense from the grain offering for jealousy brought by a man who suspects his wife of adultery (Nu 5:15).There the grain offering is part of a special request to reveal the truth of a matter; there, however, no gratitude or praise occurs, as the concern is a serious and ultimately sad one. The same is true of the reparation offering in Leviticus 5, where in vv. 11 – 13 the poor may offer a grain offering.

2 The priests are to take part of the offering — a handful — and burn it on the altar. The final description of the form and result of the offering —“an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD”— is identical to the descriptions of the burnt offering in 1:9, 13, 17. As there, it suggests the surrender of the sacrifice from human use (“by fire”) and its ultimate goal of gracious acceptance

by God (“aroma pleasing to the LORD”).

Of special interest is that which is distinctive to the grain offering. While the burnt offering has atonement as a purpose (Lev 1:4), the only note about the grain offering is that it is a “memorial portion on the altar.” The expression “memorial portion” is found only six other times in the Bible, always referring the grain offering (Lev 2:9, 16; 5:12; 6:15; 24:7; Nu 5:26). The root of this term is *zkr* (GK 2349), customarily translated “to remember.” However, its use in other, contemporary Semitic languages (e.g., Canaanite and Akkadian) suggests a meaning of “to mention, name, invoke, call to mind.” Here the term suggests that the purpose of the grain offering is to draw God’s attention to those making the offering and to their appreciation for providing food and life for them. Thus the offering is a form of returning to God a part of what he has graciously given. It provides the means by which Israel expresses gratitude and appeals to God for his continued acts that bring physical life and health.

3 The handful of grain offering placed on the altar is only part of the prepared grain. The remainder is reserved for the priests; they and their families are to enjoy this grain. The priests would not be given an allotment of land in Canaan (Jos 13 – 21). They would depend on the offerings of the rest of Israel. However much these offerings came to be understood as taxes in later Israel, there is no doubt that they provided an important source of food and livelihood for the priestly families. For the Christian, Paul’s justification of care for the full-time Christian worker is based on OT texts (1Co 9:9; 1Ti 5:18). But this does not assume that those who labor at the service of God should not be judged by a high standard (1Sa 2:12 – 36).

The term for “grain offering” occurs six times in Leviticus 2, each time introducing a variation in the offering in vv.1, 4 – 5, 7, 10, and 14. As in ch. 1, there are several types of grain offerings. There is a similarity of form that can be observed in the repetition of elements throughout each of these six sections.

Grain Offering

Intent (Preface)	1 When someone brings a grain offering to the LORD	4 If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven,	5 If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle,	7 If your grain offering is cooked in a pan,	11 Every grain offering you bring to the LORD	14 If you bring a grain offering of first-fruits to the LORD,
Composition	his offering is to be of fine flour. He is to pour oil on it, put incense on it	it is to consist of fine flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without yeast and spread with oil.	it is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast. 6 Crumble it and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering.	it is to be made of fine flour and oil.	must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire.	offer crushed heads of new grain roasted in the fire. Put oil and incense on it; it is a grain offering.
Delivery	2 take it to Aaron's sons the priests.			Bring the grain offering made of these things to the LORD; present it to the priest, who shall take it to the altar.	12 You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of the firstfruits.	
Dedication to God: The Handful	The priest shall take a handful of fine flour and oil, together with all the incense			9 He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and		
Dedication to God: The Burning	burn this as a memorial portion on the altar, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.			burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.	but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma.	16 The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the LORD by fire.
Priestly Reserve: The Portion	3 The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons:			10 The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons:		
Priestly Reserve: Holiness	it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.			it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.		

NOTES

1 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 179; cf. Levine, 9) notes that the term for "grain" (*sôlet*, GK 6159) refers to wheat, not barley (Ex 29:2; 2Ki 7:16), and to "grits," "semolina" (Akkad. *siltu*; Arab. *sult*). The amount of the offering is not specified, but Harris, 541, interprets Numbers 28:11 – 14 as requiring about two quarts of grain and a pint and a half of oil. This is the smallest amount for a grain offering found in the Bible. He notes that the frankincense is a bitter-tasting incense not fit for consumption. Gerstenberger, 39, observes that the semolina was the finest product of wheat, created as a result of careful sifting, and that the oil was pressed from olives.

2 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 180) observes that the combustible quality of oil made it an essential ingredient of the grain offering. Frankincense was a costly gum resin available only from three species of trees found in south Arabia and Somalia (Jer 6:20).

For the Akkadian behind the term *zkr* (GK 2349), see the standard dictionaries (e.g., I. J. Gelb et al., eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary*: *Volume 21*: *Z* [Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1961], 16 – 22). For Canaanite, compare the West Semitic form in the Amarna letter from Hazor (EA 228 line 19); see A. F. Rainey, *Canaanite in the Amarna Tablets*: *A Linguistic Analysis of the Mixed Dialect Used by Scribes from Canaan*: Volume II: *Morphosyn-tactic Analysis of the Verbal System* (vol. 25 of Handbook of Oriental Studies; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 222, 245, 335. Rainey translates the West Semitic verbal form *ia-az-ku-ur-mi* as a jussive: "may [he] take thought" (245). Relating it to *zkr*, Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 182) translates "the memorial portion" as a "token portion," so that the portion of the offering that does go up in smoke stands for the whole offering. Noth's view (27) that the meaning cannot be determined is no longer accepted.

REFLECTION

As noted above, the grain offering is a "memorial portion." At the Last Supper Jesus gave the bread to his disciples and said, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19). This statement is repeated in 1 Corinthirans and also there applied to the cup of wine (11:24 – 25). This act is a memorial Jesus established for the church to celebrate and so to remember his sacrifice on the cross. But it is also tied to the grain offering as a special act of gratitude Christians make before God. Their prayers draw God's attention to the salvation that Christ's sacrifice has purchased once for all on the cross, and they express joy, thanksgiving, and praise for the life they have in Christ.

b. The offering of cooked grain (2:4 – 10)

4"‘If you bring a grain offering baked in an oven, it is to consist of fine
flour: cakes made without yeast and mixed with oil, or wafers made without
yeast and spread with oil. 5If your grain offering is prepared on a griddle, it
is to be made of fine flour mixed with oil, and without yeast. 6Crumble it
and pour oil on it; it is a grain offering. 7If your grain offering is cooked in a
pan, it is to be made of fine flour and oil. 8Bring the grain offering made of
these things to the LORD; present it to the priest, who shall take it to the
altar. 9He shall take out the memorial portion from the grain offering and

burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [10]The rest of the grain offering belongs to Aaron and his sons; it is a most holy part of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.

COMMENTARY

4 – 10 This section provides alternatives and specifics regarding types of grain offerings. The general grain offering elaborated in vv.1 – 3 is now discussed in terms of various ways to prepare the flour. It can be baked in an oven, roasted on a flat metal plate, or cooked in a pan (cf. Lev 7:9). It can be in the form of cakes or smaller wafers. A (flat?) cake prepared on a flat plate should be crumbled. Practically, this might prepare the cake so that it does not crumble during the offering. The offering is already crumbled and the whole is prepared in the same way. Note that the term for "crumble" and for the small pieces that result (not translated in the NIV) occurs once earlier in the Pentateuch — in Genesis 18:5, where Abraham describes the bread he will bring for his special guests. Otherwise, there is no difference in the types of offerings.

But additional information is provided regarding the composition. The cakes are to be made of fine flour mixed with oil. But a caution is placed on the flour: It must have no yeast. Unleavened bread (*massôt*, GK 5174) is mentioned for the first time in Genesis 19:3, where it consists of the bread Lot gave to the divine messengers. It appears again in the description of the first Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread (Ex 12: 8, 15, 17 – 18, 20, 39; 13:6). Thus the bread is already associated with what is given to God and used in specially appointed religious festivals in Israel.

Note that vv.1 – 3, 4, 5 – 6, and 7 – 10 describe variations on the forms of preparation of the offering. Those in vv.4 and 5 – 6 describe only the elements of intent and composition that are changed and omit the remainder of the sacrificial procedure that is the same as in vv.1 – 3. The variant in vv.7 – 10 repeats all elements of the offering, despite the fact that it too changes only the first two elements —the intent and the procedure. This provides a literary inclusio that ends these types of grain offerings. Verse 11 repeats the charge to use only unleavened bread, and v.14 introduces an exceptional type of grain offering — the offering of firstfruits. Thus the grain offerings of vv.1 – 10 form a single unit. They describe the most general type of grain offering.

Of special interest is their repeated connection with the food prepared and given by Abraham and Lot to the divine messengers of God in Genesis 18 – 19. This is not accidental, for the vocabulary of foods appears only there in Genesis, and in Exodus 12 – 13. It occurs only as part of the religious festivals and ceremonies of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread. Of course, the meal prepared by Abraham was one received by figures identified with God himself (Ge 18:10 – 33). The Israelites, who understood the history of their patriarch Abraham, as well as the stories of Sarah and Lot, would see in each grain offering the continued "entertaining and fellowship" between themselves and the God of Abraham.

NOTES

4 – 10 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 183) suggests that the omission of the frankincense in the remaining types of preparation of the grain offering is a concession to the poor.

4 P. J. King and L. E. Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel* [Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 17, 33, 67) note that the baking oven (*tannûr*, GK 9486) was most often located in the outdoor courtyard of Israelite houses. It was beehive-shaped, made of clay, and insulated with potsherds. The fuel was wood and straw heated into hot coals before the bread was prepared. Loaves were baked against the hot, interior walls. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 184) also observes a rabbinic tradition in which the oil was smeared on the cakes in the form of a cross.

5, **7** The words for "griddle" (*maḥᵃbat*, GK 4679) and "pan" (*marḥešet*, GK 5306) occur only in Leviticus ("griddle" in 2:5; 6:14; 7:9; "pan" in 2:7; 7:9).William G. Dever (*What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 234) argues that these terms are late in Hebrew and Aramaic and that the repertoire of cooking vessels in Israel before the exile does not include them; therefore, he finds confirmation here for a late editing of the priestly source. See, however, Harrison, 52, who finds examples of the griddle more than a thousand years earlier. The griddle would be used for pancakes; the

pan may have been used for deep frying.

REFLECTION

As the anthropomorphic appearance of the divine in human form in Genesis provided a means of special blessing (a son for Sarah and Abraham) and salvation (the rescue of Lot and his family from the destruction of Sodom), so that the descendants of Abraham and Sarah, the heirs to the promise, will continue to experience blessing and salvation as they continually offer up the grain offering. Perhaps this is the reason for the anthropomorphic designation of "an aroma pleasing to the LORD."

For the Christian, there is a natural connection of language and food with the Last Supper and the words of Christ, as noted above. This too calls to mind the salvation provided by Christ on the cross and the blessing of that salvation in the covenantal community and in the promise of eternal life beyond this world (Jn 3:15 – 16).

c. The offering must be without yeast (2:11 – 13)

> 11" 'Every grain offering you bring to the LORD must be made without yeast, for you are not to burn any yeast or honey in an offering made to the LORD by fire. 12You may bring them to the LORD as an offering of the firstfruits, but they are not to be offered on the altar as a pleasing aroma. 13Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

COMMENTARY

11 – 13 This text further emphasizes the importance of keeping leaven out of the offerings given to God. Rather than the customary word for "unleavened" (*maṣṣôt*, GK 5174), the word used here is the more unusual word: *śᵉʾōr*(GK 8419).

This term occurs only here and in Exodus 12:15, 19; 13:7; Deuteronomy 16:4. These other occurrences have to do with the Feast of Unleavened Bread connected with the Passover. Thus this offering is further defined in terms of God's great act of deliverance for Israel.

The use of "honey" is also forbidden. While this was a common additive to non-Israelite sacrifices given to other deities and was customarily combined with gifts of fruits and spices (Ge 43:11; cf. Budd, 56; Levine, 12), it is excluded from that which is to be offered in the grain offering. Honey is most commonly found in the OT in connection with the description of the Promised Land as a land flowing with "milk and honey" (e.g., Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; 16:31; 33:3; Lev 20:24). The honey described in these contexts is most likely the sweet syrup of dates (though honey produced by bees was certainly known as well; cf. Jdg 14:8 – 9).

It is not clear why honey is isolated here as a forbidden product for offerings. Perhaps it symbolizes all other additives as the one most likely to be used by Israelites to supplement the offerings (cf. Hartley, 33). This is true of the leaven, for Harrison, 55, observes the symbol of its pervasive influence, whether for good or evil (Mt 16:6; Luke 12:1; 1Co 5:6; Gal 5:9). Douglas, 265, suggests that both honey and yeast represent the natural generation of life, as in the production of bread. On the altar, only divine life is present.

Thus the offerings are to be kept simple and free of additional materials. Here is an attempt to focus the purpose of the offering away from contents and details to preparation. Though these are important as examples of obedience, the point of the offering is not to prepare a sumptuous meal for God, but rather to symbolize the faithful service of Israel toward God and God's remembrance of the covenant that provided Israel with life and blessings.

The use of "salt" has appeared once before in a cultic context. In Exodus 30:35 the special, holy incense is to include salt, along with frankincense and other precious spices. The salt may have been used as a preservative to keep the oil and flour fresh, or it may have been perceived as an alternative to honey and other sweet additives. Salt also occurs in contexts of judgment: the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt for disobeying the divine messengers (Ge 19:26), the desolation that came as a result of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Dt 29:23; Zep 2:9), and the way a military general utterly

destroys an enemy city (Jdg 9:45). But it is also a means of purifying and giving new life (2Ki 2:20 – 21; Eze 16:4; 43:24).

The term "covenant of salt" occurs in 2 Chronicles 13:5, where it describes the permanence of the Davidic covenant. The kingship there forever belongs to the heirs of David. In Leviticus 2:13 the words are reversed: "salt of the covenant." The reference to the covenant here suggests the Mosaic covenant. But the permanence of the offering and its symbolism of God's covenant form an important theme implied by this phrase. Perhaps it is this permanence that the salt symbolizes (Wenham, 71).

NOTE

12 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 191) observes that salt was the major preservative in antiquity. He also suggests that all offerings burned on the altar required salt.

d. The offering of firstfruits (2:14 – 16)

> 14" 'If you bring a grain offering of firstfruits to the LORD, offer crushed
> heads of new grain roasted in the fire. 15Put oil and incense on it; it is a
> grain offering. 16The priest shall burn the memorial portion of the crushed
> grain and the oil, together with all the incense, as an offering made to the
> LORD by fire.

COMMENTARY

14 – 16 These verses describe the special grain offering of firstfruits. In the singular, the term for "firstfruits" normally refers to firstborn. Yet the offering of firstfruits was commanded at the time of the first Passover as one of the first commands given by God to Israel. He demanded the firstfruits of Israel's children (Ex 13:2, 13, 15; 22:29; 34:20), animals (13:2, 13, 15; 34:20), and harvest (22:29). In the plural, as it is used here, it refers only to the harvest of the

field (23:16, 19; 34:22, 26). The first-fruits of each harvest were to be brought by every Israelite family as an offering to the Lord.

In addition, a grain offering of "roasted grain" could be offered. The word for "roasted" (*qālmûy*, GK 7833) is used only here and in Joshua 5:11. As the language of the firstfruits builds on the first Passover in Exodus 12 – 13, so the description of roasted grain anticipates the Passover celebrated by the new generation as soon as they cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. In Joshua, the roasted grain replaces the manna of the wilderness wanderings that ceased the previous day, describes the use of the firstfruits of the land, and anticipates the full possession of the land with the symbolic harvest of the wild barley that must have grown in the Jordan Valley (R. Hess, *Joshua*: *An Introduction and Commentary* [TOTC; Leicester and Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 1996], 124 – 25). This Passover celebrated the entry into the Promised Land and its occupation. So the grain offering of firstfruits would eventually celebrate the gifts of the Promised Land at the beginning of each new harvest.

NOTE

14 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 193 – 94) and Hartley, 32, note that the "new grain" (*ʾabmîb*, GK 26) is "milky grain" in which the change from soft-seeded ears to fully ripe ones produces in wheat a color of grain that is almost white and from which liquid can be squeezed.

REFLECTION

Just as the grain offering of the firstfruits evoked memories of God's continued covenantal faithfulness to Israel, the gifts of God's people in the new covenant provide Christians with a means to celebrate the faithfulness of God in his blessings and provision of salvation (Php 4:18). Just as the grain offering was the major source of income for the priests, so the apostle Paul exhorts the Christian church to pay its workers (1Co 9:4 – 7, 13 – 14; cf. Wenham, 73; Rooker, 95 – 96).

3. The Fellowship Offering (3:1 – 17)

OVERVIEW

If the first two chapters of Leviticus summarize the major offerings according to the materials used — meat and grain — then the first three offerings provide a complete inclusion of all the recipients of an offering. Whereas the burnt offering is completely given to God and the grain offering is given to both God and the priests, the fellowship offering also is given to God, but not completely. A remainder can be used by the offerer to celebrate communion with God.

As with the other offerings there is a similar structure to this one. The first outline of the ceremony (vv.1 – 5) describes it generally without specifying the animal. The second and third descriptions are parallel to the first but identify the animal sacrificed as either a lamb (vv.6 – 11) or a goat (vv.12 – 16).

This offering most closely resembles the burnt offering of Leviticus 1, since both offerings involve the killing of animals. Of the nine elements identified there, the first three and the act of burning have parallels with the fellowship offering. But the third element (the quality) is stated at different points for the first two categories and not at all for the third category, the goat. Also the final element (the recognition of the offering as a pleasing aroma) is stated only in the first and last sections but is omitted in the section concerning the lamb offering.

Fellowship Offering

Elements	General	Lamb	Goat
1 a Condition of offerer making offering	1 If someone's offering is a fellowship offering,	6 If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the LORD,	
1b	and he offers an animal from the	he is to offer a male or female without defect. 7	12 If his offering is

Specification	herd, whether male or female,	If he offers a lamb,	a goat,
2 Presentation	he is to present before the LORD	he is to present it before the LORD.	he is to present it before the LORD.
3 Quality	an animal without defect.		
4 Slaughtering	2 He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.	8 He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting.	13 He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting.
5 Manipulation of blood	Then Aaron’s sons the priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides.	Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.	Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.
6a Parts offered: Introduction	3 From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifirce made to the LORD by fire:	9 From the fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifirce made to the LORD by fire:	14 From what he offers he is to make this offering to the LORD by fire:
6b Parts offered: List	all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 4 both kidneys with the fat around them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys	its fat, the entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 10 both kidneys with the fat around them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.	all the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 15 both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.
	5 Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar on top	11 The priest shall burn	16 The priest shall

7 Burning	of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering made by fire,	them on the altar as food, an offering made to the LORD by fire.	burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire,
8 Pleasing aroma	an aroma pleasing to the LORD.		a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the LORD's.

1“ ‘If someone’s offering is a fellowship offering, and he offers an animal
from the herd, whether male or female, he is to present before the LORD an
animal without defect. 2He is to lay his hand on the head of his offering and
slaughter it at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons the
priests shall sprinkle the blood against the altar on all sides. 3From the
fellowship offering he is to bring a sacrifice made to the LORD by fire: all
the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 4both kidneys
with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he
will remove with the kidneys. 5Then Aaron’s sons are to burn it on the altar
on top of the burnt offering that is on the burning wood, as an offering
made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.

6“ ‘If he offers an animal from the flock as a fellowship offering to the
LORD, he is to offer a male or female without defect. 7If he offers a lamb,
he is to present it before the LORD. 8He is to lay his hand on the head of his
offering and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting. Then Aaron’s sons
shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides. 9From the fellowship
offering he is to bring a sacrifirce made to the LORD by fire: its fat, the
entire fat tail cut off close to the backbone, all the fat that covers the inner
parts or is connected to them, 10both kidneys with the fat on them near the
loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys.
11The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made to the
LORD by fire.

12“ ‘If his offering is a goat, he is to present it before the LORD. 13He is
to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it in front of the Tent of Meeting.
Then Aaron’s sons shall sprinkle its blood against the altar on all sides.
14From what he offers he is to make this offering to the LORD by fire: all
the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, 15both kidneys
with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he

will remove with the kidneys. [16]The priest shall burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, a pleasing aroma. All the fat is the LORD's.

[17]" 'This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live: You must not eat any fat or any blood.' "

COMMENTARY

1 The fellowship offering was required for the priestly installation (9:18 – 22), the Feast of Weeks (23:19 – 20), and the completion of a Nazirite vow (Nu 6:17 – 20). Thus, in addition to thanksgiving and gratitude as implied in ch. 3, it could be used in response to the fulfillment of a vow (Jnh 2:9; Rooker, 100; Rainey, 207).

The name of this offering is the *zeba*ḥ *š*ᵉ*lāmm îm* (GK 2285, 8968). The first word refers to a sacrifice and signals to the reader that what is to be described is different from the grain offering of ch. 2. The second word has as its root *šlm* (GK 8966), the same root as the Hebrew word *šālmôm*, "peace" (GK 8934). For this reason many early translations designated this offering as the peace offering, but that is too general a term to describe accurately what is found here. It is not merely an offering that establishes a cessation of war and hatred — an understanding of peace that is frequent in modern use of the term. Instead, it contributes to a harmonious relationship between the offerer and God. A good way to describe this is with the term "fellowship."

2 Many of the actions, including placing the hands on the offering, slaughtering it, sprinkling the blood on the altar, and offering and burning it on the altar, have been previously mentioned in the burnt offering. The entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the wood on the fire, and the fragrant aroma also have parallels to phrases in the ceremony of Leviticus 1.

3 – 17 The distinctiveness of this offering is found in the detailed list of the parts of the animal to be offered to the LORD. In every case this includes all the fat from inside the animal, the kidneys with their suet, and the covering over the liver. In the case of the sheep, the fat tail is also offered to God. This was a delicacy and considered the best part of the sheep; it is not found on goats. Harrison, 58, continues the old argument that the prohibition of fat has dietary

implications for the prevention of high cholesterol, cancer, and parasites. While this is nowhere explicit in the text, neither is the more frequent application that this involves offering the best part of the animal to God as an example of offering the best part of ourselves to our Lord (Ro 12:1 – 2). The offering of the kidneys and the inner parts to God may symbolize the emotions and the offering of the deepest and inner feelings of the one doing the sacrifice (Wenham, 80 – 81, citing Job 19:27; Ps 16:7; Jer 4:14; 12:2; Gerstenberger, 48, citing Ps 7:9[10]; Jer 11:20; 17:10). But the text itself provides no explanation for choosing these parts of the animal.

The list of items burnt on the altar as a sacrifice reveals as much by what it omits as it does by what it includes. What were considered the best parts of the animal went to God, but all the meat remained. Unlike the grain offering, the meat was not given to the priests. Instead, it was returned to the offerer, who could enjoy it in a meal with his or her family. It is possible that various festivals mentioned in early Israel involved the fellowship offering. For example, the sacrifice in 1 Sam uel 1, to which Elkanah and Hannah went, might be a fellowship offering.

The burnt offering and the fellowship offering are combined forty-seven times in the Bible. They are also associated in the ritual of Ugaritc. 1300 BC (Wenham, 77). The first occurrence of this combination is in Exodus 20:24, which constitutes the first set of commands in the Book of the Covenant. The laws describe the building of an altar to the Lord and designate the type of offerings to be offered on it as burnt and fellowship offerings. In Exodus 24:5, Moses obediently prepares for the ratification of the covenant by offering both types of sacrifices. Thus these two types of sacrifices apparently went together. The burnt offering symbolized the giving of everything back to God, who had given it in the first place, and the reconciliation between God and the sinner. The fellowship offering symbolized participation with God in the sacrifice as God returned part of the offering to the offerer.

NOTES

1 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 204) translates the fellowship offering as the “sacrifice of well-being.” He observes that this describes the condition of the

offerer, who under no constraints provides a voluntary sacrifice (see also Harrison, 56; Hartley, 37 – 38). Hartley appeals to the plural form of the root *šlm* (GK 8966) and argues that this indicates an abstract idea. Levine, 15, points to the Akkadian cognate with the sense of a gift of greeting and to the Ugaritic Keret epic, in which the king offers this sacrifice to an enemy general in order to lift his siege. The translation chosen here understands that the root describes peaceful and joyful relations between God and the offerers and among the offerers themselves.

Scholars such as Gerstenberger, 46 – 47, maintain that the double name, "sacrifice of the fellowship offering" (*zebaḥšelāmm îm*), indicates an origin from two separate s0urces. The "sacrifice" derives from a family meal and the "fellowship offering" from a sacrificial culticrite; during the exile the two were combined. There is no biblical basis for separating these sacrifices or for their putative combination at some later date. Levine, 14 – 15, observes the occurrence of an early form of this sacrifice in the Passover of Exodus 12:27, which refers to it as a *zebaḥ* ("sacrifice"); note also the detailed description in 1 Samuel 9:12 – 25.

3 – 4 The "fat that covers the inner parts" and the fat around the internal organs define the suet (*ḥēleb*, GK 2693). The "covering of the liver" actually uses a Hebrew term for "excess, protuberance," which describes "a fingerlike projection from the liver, close to the right kidney" (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 208). This lobe, along with the remainder of the liver, was used among ancient Near Eastern peoples for divination. Deformities or unusual aspects of livers found in sacrificed animals were thought to contain divine portents regarding the future. It may be significant that portions of the liver are to be given back to God in Israel rather than be left for purposes of divination. (Gerstenberger, 48, makes the connection between divination and Leviticus 3 but does not see the distinction.)

Warning, 175, observes that the term for "kidneys" (*kᵉlāyōt*, GK 4000) occurs here for the first time and will reappear some fourteen times through 9:19, thus linking this chapter with those that follow regarding sacrifices and their use in the installation of the priests.

5 Noth, 32, observes that the burnt offering is commanded before the

fellowship offering may be presented. Most likely this is the obligatory morning burnt offering, which had to be presented before any other offerings could be placed on the altar.

9 The suet also includes the broad tail of the sheep. This tail, or protrusion of fat, was distinctive to sheep of the region, as already noted by Herodotus (1.113; cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 211 – 12).

11 The designation of the offering as "food" (*leḥem*, GK 4312) may suggest its preparation in the same way that it was offered to humans (Levine, *Leviticus*, 17). Rooker, 103, compares 1 Corinthirans 10:18 – 22 and its equation of eating food offered to an idol with having fellowship with the deity represented by the idol.

16 The last part of this verse asserts that all suet belongs to the Lord. For Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 214) this suggests that every animal needed to be sacrificed at the altar before it could be eaten. Warning, 102 – 3, observes that the term "food gift" (*ʾiššeh*, GK 852) occurs three times in ch. 1, six times in ch. 2, and six times in ch. 3. This comprises nearly a quarter of all its appearances in the entire Bible. As such, it suggests a key word for these three chapters and a special significance for the last occurrence in 3:16, where it is described as a "soothing aroma" (cf. 3:5).

17 The change here to the second person plural is unique to this chapter. Gerstenberger, 49, sees the hand of an editor. But such admonitions are customary in biblical directives, and their placement at the end of a section of cultic description may be expected. In chs. 1 – 7, second person plural suffixes occur only in 1:2; 6:11; 7:26, 32. All of these contain commands to the people, with 7:26 also containing a prohibition on eating blood, but 1:2 is most important. With 3:17 it forms an envelope construction for the first three sacrifices (Rolf Rendtorff, *Leviticus* [BKAT 3.1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1985], 134).

Furthermore, ch. 3 has seven occurrences of "all, every" (*kôl*, GK 3972) and twelve of "fat" (*ḥēleb*, GK 2693), as Warning, 67 – 70, observes. The association of these two words and their number of occurrences at the significant frequencies of seven and twelve is hardly accidental and suggests a perfection

and completion to this chapter, culminating in v.17, where “fat” occurs once and “all” occurs twice.

The prohibition of fat and blood is described as a “lasting ordinance.” This expression first occurs in Exodus 12:14, where it describes the Passover. A few verses later (v.17) it describes the Feast of Unleavened Bread that follows Passover. Elsewhere it is connected to the priesthood (Ex 27:21; 28:43; 29:9; Lev 7:36; 10:9). Thus it is identified with priestly and cultic matters that are specifically ordained by God as concerns of special importance.

Blood is forbidden in the covenant with Noah (Ge 9:4) because it represents the life of the creature that especially belongs to God. This law is repeated in the NT (Ac 15:29). Fat is forbidden here, presumably because it symbolizes the best part of the animal that alone belongs to God. It may refer specifically to sacrifices. Elsewhere the term for “fat” (*ḥēleb*) is associated with God (Dt 32:38; Isa 1:11; 43:24; Eze 44:7; see Budd, 72, 75, who connects it with “strength” as in 2Sa 1:22; Dt 32:15; Isa 34:6). But there is no mention in the Bible of the fat part of an animal being eaten by an Israelite except to condemn it (1Sa 2:15 – 17).

REFLECTION

For the Christian the burnt offering and the fellowship offering are combined at the cross of Christ. He presented his body as a burnt offering totally given to God, and yet his body is given back to Christians who form it as the church, which is the body of Christ (1Co 12:27; Eph 4:12). This latter part of Christ’s ser vice resembles the fellowship offering. Wenham, 82 – 83 (cf. Rooker, 105), likens the fellowship offering to the Lord’s Supper. Both activities were meals and this is unique for sacrifices. Both demand cleanness before God (Lev 7:20; 1Co 11:27, 30). In both there is a distinctive element of joy and gratitude in the context of encountering the holy God. Kellogg, 97, comments:

> And now the Shekinah light of the ancient tent of meeting begins to illumine even the sacramental table, and as we listen to the words of Jesus, “Take, eat! This is My body which was broken for you,” we are reminded of the feast of the peace-offerings. The Israel of God is to be fed with the flesh of the sacrificed Lamb which became their peace.

4. The Purification Offering (4:1 – 5:13)

OVERVIEW

Warning, 82 – 84, finds that chs. 4 – 5 are held together by the word for "person, member" (*nepeš*, GK 5883), which recurs eight times and introduces new sections: 4:2, 27; 5:1, 2, 4, 15, 17, 21. Further, the passive of the verb "to forgive" (Niphal form *w^{e}nisla^{ḥ}*, GK 6142) occurs nine times in these two chapters (4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18, 26). The two terms describe the theme of these texts: the availability of forgiveness to anyone.

a. Introduction (4:1 – 2)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Say to the Israelites: 'When anyone sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands —

COMMENTARY

1 The note about the Lord's addressing of Moses is repeated here from 1:1. The address was not used to introduce the grain or fellowship offerings. But the remaining offering to be described (5:14) and the review of the offerings (6:8, 19, 24) are all introduced by a note that God spoke to Moses (in the case of 6:19, it occurs a few verses into the discussion of the grain offering). Thus, it appears that the burnt offering, the grain offering, and the fellowship offering are the three basic offerings Israel renders to the Lord, and the purification offering is a variation on the burnt offering. Hence the introduction is repeated here but not in chs. 2 and 3.

In other words, the first three offerings are stylistically associated, and the remaining ones are derivatives of these. They form a new section. In the case of the purification offering, this is further demonstrated by many references to the first three offerings within the description here (4:3, 10, 14, 20 – 21, 24 – 26, 29

– 31, 33 – 35).

2 The purification offering describes a distinctive type of burnt offering in which an animal sacrifice is burnt on the altar as an offering to the Lord. The key to this offering is that it provides for sins that are "unintentional." This word, *šᵉgāgâ* (GK 8704), occurs nineteen times in the OT, with its first appearance coming here (see also Lev 4:2, 22, 27; 5:15, 18; 22:14; Nu 15:24 – 29; 35:11, 15; Jos 20:3, 9; Ecc 5:5; 10:5). The uses in Leviticus and Numbers 15 describe various sin and reparation offerings. In Numbers 35 and Joshua 20, it describes the cities of refuge for someone who kills another person without planning to do so. The two occurrences in Ecclesiastes describe mistakes.

Twice the term is glossed with a further definition of its meaning. In Numbers 15:24 this sin is committed "without the community being aware of it" (lit., "apart from the eyes of the congregation"). In Joshua 20:3 the killer commits the deed "accidentally" (lit., "without knowing, planning"). Thus this sin is certainly not deliberate (Harris, 547 – 48), but there is also no clear example of intentionality in any of its uses. Though it is possible to understand this as a mistake or failing apart from intentionality, some see the sins of 5:1 – 4 as examples of intentional acts (Harrison, 60 – 61; C. Van Dam, "The Meaning of בִּשְׁגָגָה in *Unity in Diversity*: *Studies Presented to Dr. Jelle Faber on the Occasion of His Retirement*, ed. R. Faber [Hamilton: Senate of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1989], 13 – 24). But these may be sins of omission (Levine, *Leviticus*, 19, 26). The lack of knowledge or intention described in this verse corresponds to the absence of a demand for sorrow or repentance to accompany the sacrifice. The purification offering was required, but unlike ch. 16, where intentional sins are dealt with by the high priest, there is no explicit demand regarding the offerer's attitude.

Thus, the term describes a sin, whether ritualor ethical (Kiuchi, 38; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 228 – 31), that was not intentionally planned but the sinner committed without knowing it. The issue of a sudden, impulsive sin may be envisioned here as well, but it is not clearly stated. Milgrom observes that only inadvertent sin is expiated through these sacrifices. Intentional sins bar the guilty one from the sanctuary (Nu 15:30 – 31) until the Day of Atonement, when the high priest represents these people (along with all Israel) and achieves reconciliation. This is preferable to the view that the question of intentionality serves to empower priests, who can then decide whose sacrifice will be received

and whose will not (Gerstenberger, 63).

The offering's use for any of the Lord's commands suggests both ethical and ritual injunctions. Only in Israel is the forgiveness of both tied to a single offering.

The first two verses form an introduction to the purification offering. It is followed by a description of the offering.

b. The general purification offering (4:3 – 35)

3“ ‘If the anointed priest sins, bringing guilt on the people, he must bring
to the LORD a young bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has
committed. 4He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting
before the LORD. He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before
the LORD. 5Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and
carry it into the Tent of Meeting. 6He is to dip his finger into the blood and
sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of
the sanctuary. 7The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of
the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting.
The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt
offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8He shall remove all the fat
from the bull of the sin offering — the fat that covers the inner parts or is
connected to them, 9both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and
the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys — 10just as
the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the
priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. 11But the hide of the
bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal
— 12that is, all the rest of the bull — he must take outside the camp to a
place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood
fire on the ash heap.

13“ ‘If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what
is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though the community
is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. 14When they become aware of the
sin they committed, the assembly must bring a young bull as a sin offering

and present it before the Tent of Meeting. [15]The elders of the community
are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the LORD, and the bull shall
be slaughtered before the LORD. [16]Then the anointed priest is to take some
of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting. [17]He shall dip his finger into
the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the
curtain. [18]He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is
before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The rest of the blood he shall pour
out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of
Meeting. [19]He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, [20]and
do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way
the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven. [21]Then
he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first
bull. This is the sin offering for the community.

[22]" 'When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any
of the commands of the LORD his God, he is guilty. [23]When he is made
aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering a male goat
without defect. [24]He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at
the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered before the LORD. It is a
sin offering. [25]Then 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 the blood at the base of the altar. [26]He shall burn all
the fat on the altar as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering. In this
way the priest will make atonement for the man's sin, and he will be
forgiven.

[27]" 'If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is
forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty. [28]When he is made
aware of the sin he committed, he must bring as his offering for the sin he
committed a female goat without defect. [29]He is to lay his hand on the head
of the sin offering and slaughter it at the place of the burnt offering. [30]Then
the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns
of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of
the altar. [31]He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the
fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar as an aroma
pleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for him,
and he will be forgiven.

[32]" 'If he brings a lamb as his sin offering, he is to bring a female without

defect. [33]He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it for a sin offering at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered. [34]Then 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 the blood at the base of the altar. [35]He shall remove all the fat, just as the fat is removed from the lamb of the fellowship offering, and the priest shall burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

COMMENTARY

3 – 35 There is a repeated structure in the description of the purification offering in ch. 4. The difference here is determined by the status of the person or people who commit the sin. It appears to list first those whose sin is most disruptive to God's continued presence among and blessing of Israel, viz., the priest and the whole community of Israel. It then reviews the purification offering for a civil leader and finally a member of the community. As the status diminishes, so does the value of the animal sacrificed. For the last category — that of a citizen — either a female goat or a female lamb may be offered, and the two are described differently.

Purification Offering

Elements	Priest	Whole Community	Leader	Citizen (Goat)	Citi Lam
1a Condition of offerer	3 If the anointed priest sins,	13 If the whole Israelite community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's	22 When a leader sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in any of the commands of	27 If a member of the community sins unintentionally and does what is forbidden in	32 I brin

making offering	bringing guilt on the people,	commands, even though the community is unaware of the matter, they are guilty. 14 When they become aware of the sin they committed,	the LORD his God, he is guilty.23 When he is made aware of the sin he committed,	any of the LORD's commands, he is guilty. 28 When he is made aware of the sin he committed,	lam puri offe
1b Specifircation	he must bring to the LORD a young bull without defect as a purifircation offering for the sin he has committed.	the assembly must bring a young bull as a purifircation offering	he must bring as his offering a male goat without defect.	he must bring as his offering for the sin he committed a female goat without defect.	he i brin fem with defe
2 Presentation	4 He is to present the bull at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD.	and present it before the Tent of Meeting.			
3 Slaughtering	He is to lay his hand on its head and slaughter it before the	15 The elders of the community are to lay their hands on the bull's head before the LORD, and	24 He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it at the place where the burnt offering is slaughtered	29 He is to lay his hand on the head of the purifircation offering and slaughter it at the place of	33 H lay on i and slau for puri offe the

	LORD.	the bull shall be slaughtered before the LORD.	before the LORD. It is a purifircation offering.	the burnt offering.	whe burı offe slau
4 Manipulation of blood	5 Then the anointed priest shall take some of the bull's blood and carry it into the Tent of Meeting.6 He is to dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle some of it seven times before the LORD, in front of the curtain of the sanctuary.	16 Then the anointed priest is to take some of the bull's blood into the Tent of Meeting.17 He shall dip his finger into the blood and sprinkle it before the LORD seven times in front of the curtain.	5 Then the priest shall take some of the blood of the purifircation offering with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.	30 Then the priest is to take some of the blood with his finger and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.	34 T prie take of tl of tl puri offe witl fing put horı altai burı offe pou rest bloc base altai
	7 The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting.	18 He is to put some of the blood on the horns of the altar that is before the LORD in the Tent of Meeting. The			

	The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.	rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.			
5a Parts offered: Introduction	8 He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the purifircation offering – the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them,	19 He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar,	26 He shall burn all the fat on the altar	31 He shall remove all the fat,just as the fat is removed from the fellowship offering,	35 H rem the as th rem fron lam fello offe
5b Parts offered:List	9 both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys –10 just as the fat is	20 and do with the bull just as he did with the bull for the purification offering.	as he burned the fat of the fellowship offering.		

	removed from the cow sacrifirced as a fellowship offering				
8a Burning: At the altar	Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering.	In this way the priest will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.	In this way the priest will make atonement for the man’s sin, and he will be forgiven.	and the priest shall burn it on the altar	and prie burı the top offe mad LOI fire.
8b Burning: Outside the camp	11 But the hide of the bull and all its fl esh, as well as the head and legs, the inner parts and offal – 12 that is, all the rest of the bull – he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on	21 Then he shall take the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull.			

	the ash heap.				
9 Pleasing aroma and Conclusion		This is the purifircation offering for the community.	as an aromapleasing to the LORD. In this way the priest will make atonement for him, and he will be forgiven.	In this way the priest will make atonement for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.	

There are differences between the types of purification offerings. For example, those for the anointed priest and the community are designated as purification offerings at the beginning of the ceremony that is described. Though none of the others are described in this way, they all have a statement —usually as the last sentence — that atonement has been made and the sins will be forgiven. Even the offering for the sin of the community includes this observation. Nevertheless, already one may anticipate that the offerings for the priest and the whole community rank as especially significant, as do their sins.

Again, the first two types of offerings include the sprinkling of blood at the curtain to the Most Holy Place and the altar of incense. The others do not describe this event in their instructions for the manipulation of the blood but place the blood on the altar of burnt offering outside the Holy Place. It suggests the greater seriousness of the offense if done by the priest or by the congregation. The uncleanness has penetrated farther into the sanctuary because of the gravity of a high priest's sin or a sin by the whole population of Israel.

There are several additional features to this observation of gradations. First, the priest is often designated as "the anointed priest" (vv.3, 5, 16). The term for "anointed" is *māšmîaḥ* (GK 5431), the Messiah that in Greek is the *christos*, or Christ. It first appears here in the Bible. It most often refers to kings (especially Saul in 1 Sam uel), but in Leviticus it refers to the priests and suggests their method of ordination as one that sets them apart from the people and in some way enables them to symbolize and represent the whole people of Israel (Hess, "Image"). Their offering of sacrifice to God anticipates the offering by Jesus Christ of himself as his own sacrifice to God for all people (Heb 9:26; 10:12 –

18).

A second point in the gradations has to do with the animals offered. The use of a bull reflects the importance of this animal as the most valuable among Israelite livestock. The civil leader who sins must bring a male goat, while citizens can bring a female goat or a lamb. The cheapest herd for a commoner consists of female animals with at most one male for breeding. Therefore, a female animal is easier for the average Israelite to present. A male animal would not be difficult for a leader with more wealth (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 252).

Note the pervasive nature of sin throughout all levels of social strata, both among individuals and for the entire community (Ro 3:23). In every case, without exception or favoritism, sin generates uncleanness and requires a proportionate sacrifice to deal with it (Ro 6:23; Rooker, 108). Greater ranks and status require a sacrifice of greater value. Further, as already exemplified by Exodus 32 – 34, a whole nation could sin and face judgment. This principle remains in force during Israel's history and, as far as the Bible is concerned, remains true today (Kellogg, 125 – 29); therefore, the purification offering provides a means of reconciliation between God and the impure nation.

Finally, the emphasis on the placement or manipulation of the blood is central to all the descriptions of the purification offering. It appears that the purification of the altars of incense and of burnt offering by placing blood on the horns and/or the base — a practice described in every form of the offering — symbolizes the completeness of the purification. The altars are thereby made ready to receive the offering and prepared for God to approach and accept the sacrifice.

12, **21** The priest removes the remainder of the bull outside the camp to a place that is clean. God commanded this for the remainder of the bull sacrificed in the priests' ordination (Ex 29:14), and it will recur in the priests' instruction for the burnt offering (Lev 6:11) and in the actual ordination of the priests (8:17; 9:11). It envisions the remnants of the animal, whose most valuable parts God has received in a holy offering. The remainder cannot be kept in the camp but must be taken outside the camp and burned in a place that does not defile the parts that remain.

NOTES

3 The “anointed priest” is a preexilic title for the high priest, who alone has the oil poured on his head (8:12, 30; Nu 3:3). This is an early rabbinic understanding (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 231) that fits well with the extraordinary expense of this particular purification offering.

The “sin offering” (*maṣṣôt*, GK 2633) derives from the root *ḥṭ'*, which in the Piel stem and its formations, as here, consistently carries the meaning “to purify.” Thus, “purification offering” seems appropriate. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 253 – 64) describes the offering as that which purifies the sanctuary. But Kiuchi, 65 – 66, should be taken into account here, as well as in ch. 9 and especially 10:17. He sees this as an offering that expiates the sinner’s guilt. The two are not mutually exclusive.

As described in this chapter, these purification offerings deal with inadvertent sins or failings and can be handled with the sprinkling of the blood either on the altar of the burnt offering outside the Tent of Meeting or, for more serious uncleanness (by a high priest or by the entire population), within the Holy Place at the altar of incense. All sins dealt with on the Day of Atonement (ch. 16) affect the Most Holy Place and can be resolved only by applying blood to the inner sanctuary. This itself is a powerful lesson about the effects of sins, especially intentional ones. They affect the inner relationship with God and, if not dealt with (1Jn 1:9), can bring about a departure of God from the sanctuary (Eze 11).

The consumption of part of the purification offering by the priests (6:26[19]) demonstrates the absence of any magical power attached to this meat. The blood of the sacrificed animal provides a means of purifying the cult (Jacob Milgrom, “Two Kinds of *Ḥaṭṭāt*,” *VT* 26 [1976]: 333 – 37; Hartley, 58). It should be noted that the purification of the sanctuary does not eliminate the possibility of any positive effect on the offerer (note the repeated mention of forgiveness in vv.20, 26, 31, 35), as the text never suggests otherwise; therefore, purification becomes a means of forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. Its reality as a prototype for Christ’s offering of himself in the NT cannot be denied.

6 Sevenfold sprinkling symbolizes its completeness. It is used with the

purification offering (4:6, 17; 16:14 – 15, 19; Nu 19:4), for the purification of scale disease (14:7, 16, 27, 51), and for the anointing oil on the altar (8:11; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 233).

7 Gorman, 232, suggests that the blood serves two purposes: to purify the altar by placing it on the horns, and to consecrate the altar by placing it at the base. But Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 289 – 92) demonstrates that the purification offering's position in ch. 8 belies a purpose of consecration. Though elsewhere prayer and incense are connected, there is no reference to them in this chapter (contra Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Book of Leviticus," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 1:1035; Rooker, 111).

"Horns" of the altar are the projections on each of the four corners of the altar. There are many examples of incense altars and larger altars of this type from ancient Israel. The base of the altar contains a channel for drawing away the blood, as seen in the thirteenth-century BC altar cult center in the Timnah Valley and 1 Kings 18:32 (Eze 43:13, 17). On larger altars, they could have been used as convenient posts for tying the animal before slaughter on the altar (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 249). For the incense, see Exodus 30:34 – 36.

10 Kiuchi, 126 – 28, argues that the high priest could not obtain atonement for his own guilt even for an inadvertent sin. It is, however, unlikely and unmanageable for the high priest to need to wait until the Day of Atonement, even for an accidental sin (Hartley, 46).

12 The burning of the remaining parts of the animal outside the camp describes how the animal's association with that which is unclean requires its residue to be removed from the presence of the community. A huge ash dump (twelve meters high and the length of a hippodrome) north of Jerusalem at the site of the Mandelbaum gate was attested in early rabbinic literature and up till the end of the nineteenth century, when it was analyzed and found to contain animal remains (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 240).

13, **15** The "whole Israelite community" refers to the entire population and not a segment of one sort or another (Ex 12:3, 6; 17:1; see Levine, 22, rather than Wenham, 98, who finds here only a representative part).

13 – 14 An inadvertent sin committed by the whole congregation yet hidden from them initially may seem difficult to imagine. Milgrom suggests a miscalculation by the priests that results in the celebration of a national festival on the wrong day.

20 Here the atonement (see comment at 1:4) is tied to forgiveness, suggesting that in the context of this purification offering, at least, there is an element of divine forgiveness as well as purification in the sacrifice (Hartley, 63 – 66).

21 As is clear from the above chart, the "first bull" refers to the one given for the sin of the priest and requiring the fuller procedure for disposal (vv.11 – 12).

22 The "leader" is the Hebrew *nāśî'*a, (GK 5954), a clan leader (Nu 3:24, 30, 35) or head of an ancestral house (Nu 7:2; 36:1; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 246).

c. Conditions requiring purifircation(5:1 – 4)

1“ ‘If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public
charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will
be held responsible.
2“ ‘Or if a person touches anything ceremonially unclean — whether the
carcasses of unclean wild animals or of unclean livestock or of unclean
creatures that move along the ground — even though he is unaware of it, he
has become unclean and is guilty.
3“ ‘Or if he touches human uncleanness — anything that would make
him unclean —even though he is unaware of it, when he learns of it he will
be guilty.
4“ ‘Or if a person thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether
good or evil — in any matter one might carelessly swear about — even
though he is unaware of it, in any case when he learns of it he will be guilty.

COMMENTARY

1 This verse begins a series of four verses expressing four conditions that render a person guilty and in need of the reconciliation provided by a form of the

purification offering detailed in vv.5 – 13. The four conditions are arranged in A – B – B'– A' order. The first and the last describe matters of judicial oaths and issues of lying, while the second and third deal with cultic uncleanness related to objects a person might touch. In this first list of prohibitions, both civil (vv.1 and 4) and religious matters (vv.2 and 3) are joined. This will be the case in other legal collections in Leviticus. Here it describes the variety of categories that can render a person guilty. It also compares the guilt of knowing something and remaining silent (v.1) with the guilt of not knowing that one is doing something wrong (vv.2 – 3).

The law describes someone who witnesses an oath, or (lit.) the curse that is attached to an oath. This oath may be an official request for information that the guilty one knows about, as is suggested by the NIV's rendering. It is something most likely to be heard, but even if the guilty one does not hear it, that person is liable as long as he or she knows about the matter and does not respond. This corresponds to the judicial perjury forbidden in the Decalogue (Ex 20:16; Dt 5:20). In Leviticus the witness does not actively lie under oath but passively allows important information — perhaps communication that could save an accused citizen's life — to go unreported. It is a virtue to stand up for the truth even when the result may threaten the witness.

The expression "he will be held responsible" occurs here and twice more in this book (5:17; 17:16). Literally it means, "(and) he will bear his iniquity." The Hebrew is *wᵉnāśāʾ ʿᵃwônô* (GK 5951, 6411).With the suffix "his," the expression is unique to these three occurrences. Without this suffix (e.g., "he will bear iniquity" or "he will bear their iniquity"), it occurs thirteen times in the Bible. It clearly means to take on oneself the blame and guilt for a misdeed.

In a number of cases this expression refers to God's forgiving of the sins of others by taking the guilt on himself (Pss 32:5; 85:2[3]; Hos 14:2[3]; Mic 7:18). The intentionality of the sin of v.1 followed by this assignment of guilt has led to the conclusion that no atonement is possible (Budd, 93 – 94). In that case it is not clear what purpose listing this sin here serves. It is better to see a transgression that, despite its intentionality, may receive forgiveness, whether in the purification of the pollution it causes to the sanctuary (by the reparation offer-ing) or in forgiveness of the offender (by the Day of Atonement rituals). As v.5 indicates (referring to this sin as well as those in vv.2 – 4), personal confession is also required.

2 The prohibition concerning the touching of any unclean animal is expressed for the first time here — repeated throughout the Levitical laws (7:24; 11:8, 11, 24 – 25, 27 – 28, 35 – 40; 17:15; 22:8; Dt 14:8). The structure of the three phrases describing the carcasses begins with a general clause about anything that was alive. Then it moves on to specify cattle and swarming creatures in the second and third clauses. The "cattle" refers both to larger animals, such as cows and bulls, and to smaller ones, such as sheep and goats. The category of creatures that "move along the ground" is misleading, as it literally means "swarmers." This can include frogs (Ex 8:3), sea creatures without fins and scales (Lev 11:10), winged insects (11:21), weasels, mice, and lizards (11:29). See further in Leviticus 11.

3 "Human uncleanness" refers not merely to dead people but to any human waste or product that is unclean (see further in chs. 12 – 15). In both vv.2 and 3 the matter is not known or intended at the time of the encounter. But that does not excuse the uncleanness or negate its need for atonement. In these verses the reality of objective uncleanness is introduced. The intention of the person does not matter. The touching can take place without the knowledge of the person doing it, or it can take place with the person's being unaware of the uncleanness involved. Nevertheless, it is a sin and puts that person in need of reconciliation with God.

4 The meaning of this action depends on the adverbial phrase modifying the verb, "takes an oath." The verbal form occurs one other time in the MT (in Ps 106:33), where it describes how Moses spoke "rash words" at the waters of Meribah. This may refer to the arrogant statement in which Moses addresses Israel and refers to the action as coming from both himself and God: "Must we bring you water out of this rock?" (Nu 20:10). For this assertion he was forbidden entrance into the Promised Land (Nu 20:24; 27:14). The same arrogance may be suggested here, where the speaker rashly attaches his or her own words and intentions to those of God. This recalls the concern of James that there should be no boasts about future intentions among God's people but only a willingness to follow the Lord's will (Jas 5:13 – 17). Indeed, the final verse of that section recalls the first prohibition of Leviticus 5: "Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins."

The combination of sins related to cultic uncleanness and to personal morality integrates these two areas. It demonstrates that both the cult and morality are related.

NOTES

1 Hartley, 68, suggests other possible interpretations of this verse that involve either the hearing of an unlawful curse pronounced (Noth, 44), or the person pronouncing a curse on the thief or someone who finds what has been lost but fails to report it. Nevertheless, the natural sense of the text is the interpretation favored above. As Milgrom observes, the "oath, curse" (אָלָה, GK 460) is used for exculpatory statements. The ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature always advised witnesses to avoid the courts and not to testify.

In this verse the point demonstrates that witnesses could not be compelled to testify and, therefore, punishment remains with God (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 294 – 96). Gerstenberger, 69, cites Judges 17:2, where Micah's mother curses the thief not realizing it is her own son. In that case, however, the son is both the guilty party and the one who hears the curse and knows who committed the crime. Douglas, 131, argues that this law raises a civil crime to the level of sacrilege by forcing potentially guilty persons to swear an oath. Levine, 27, concludes that the problem here is negligence involving speech rather than any action.

4 The need for confession occurs where the sin is deliberate (see 5:1 – 4; 16:21; 26:40; Nu 5:6). This was also true in earlier Hittite religion where confession of deliberate sin was necessary for divine forgiveness, and this is true elsewhere (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 301 – 2, 369, 374).

d. The purification offering for sins of 5:5 – 13

5" 'When anyone is guilty in any of these ways, he must confess in what way he has sinned 6and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering;

and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.

7“ ‘If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for his sin — one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. 8He is to bring them to the priest, who shall first offer the one for the sin offering. He is to wring its head from its neck, not severing it completely, 9and is to sprinkle some of the blood of the sin offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a sin offering. 10The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the prescribed way and make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.

11“ ‘If, however, he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a sin offering. He must not put oil or incense on it, because it is a sin offering. 12He is to bring it to the priest, who shall take a handful of it as a memorial portion and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. It is a sin offering. 13In this way the priest will make atonement for him for any of these sins he has committed, and he will be forgiven. The rest of the offering will belong to the priest, as in the case of the grain offering.’”

COMMENTARY

5 – 13 The wrongdoings listed in 5:1 – 4 provide the background for this additional section on purification offerings. These offerings are designed for all the Israelites, no matter how wealthy or poor. Verse 5 adds the requirement of the need to confess the sin that has been committed. All eleven occurrences of this form of the verb describe the confession of sin (the Hithpael root of *ydh,* GK 3344; Lev 5:5; 16:21; 26:40; Nu 5:7; Da 9:4, 20; Ezra 10:1; Ne 1:6; 9:2 – 3; 2Ch 30:22 — though the last is ambiguous). Thus it seems as though the entire ceremony presumes the recognition and confession of the sin. Its note here may reflect the need to recognize a sin previously unknown or unrecognized by the people involved. In any case, the principle that confession precedes forgiveness is recognized here as background to its expression for the Day of Atonement (Lev 16) and in the NT (1Jn 1:9).

There are three types of the offering, according to what the person committing the sin can afford. The sequence may be compared to the form of the purification

offering already noted.

Purification Offering

Elements	Lamb or Goat	Two Birds	Flour
1a Condition of offerer making offering	6 and, as a penalty for the sin he has committed, he must bring to the LORD	7 If he cannot afford a lamb, he is to bring	11 If, however, he cannot afford two doves or two young pigeons, he is to bring as an offering for his sin
1b Specifircation	a female lamb or goat from the flock as a purifircation offering;	two doves or two young pigeons to the LORD as a penalty for his sin - one for a purifiration offering and the other for a burnt offering.	a tenth of an ephah of fine flour for a purifircation offering. He must not put oil or incense on it, because it is a purifircation offering.
2 Reparation		8 He is to bring them to the priest, who shall first offer the one for the purifircation	12 He is to bring it to the priest, offering.
3 Slaughtering		He is to wring its head from its neck, not severing it completely,	who shall take a handful of it as its memorial portion
4 Manipulation of blood		9 and is to sprinkle some of the blood of the purifircation offering against the side of the altar; the rest of the blood must be drained out at the base of the altar. It is a purifircation offering.	

5aParts offered: Introduction			
5bParts offered: List			
8a Burning: At the altar		[10 The priest shall then offer the other as a burnt offering in the prescribed way]	and burn it on the altar on top of the offerings made to the LORD by fire.
8b Burning: Outside the camp			
9 Pleasing aroma and Result	and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin.	and make atonement for him for the sin he has committed, and he will be forgiven.	It is a purifircation offering.

The first type of offering — that of a lamb or goat — was described in detail in the purification offering of ch. 4; therefore, it is not described in any detail again. The second offering combines the purification offering and the burnt offering with two birds. One bird is to be used for a burnt offering, as in 1:14 – 17; the other bird is offered as a purification offering.

Because no purification offering involving birds has been described, it is necessary to provide more detail than for the previous offering. The description is similar to the burnt offering of a bird with the addition of a note about not severing the head from the body (v.8) and the need to sprinkle some of the blood at the side of the altar as well as pour out the remainder at the altar's base (v.9). The need to retain the body as a whole piece may explain the former note. The act of sprinkling the blood against the altar occurs elsewhere only with the burnt offering. This is different from the other examples of the purification offering.

The purification offering of grain resembles the grain offering in all the details that are given, with the exception that no oil or incense is added. As noted above (cf. the comment on 2:1), the oil and incense symbolize joy and praise. This is

not found in an offering for sin. An ephah is about two quarts of flour.

These offerings continue the themes of the purification offering, in which particular sins of individuals and the whole community of Israel may be dealt with. Again, each of the offerings indicates that it is for sin, and two of the three types specify that atonement is the result. This is the same as the purification offering but different from the first three offerings, where atonement is only mentioned once (1:4). All people, of any economic means, are able to offer sacrifice and find reconciliation with God (Jn 3:16; 4:14; Ac 2:21; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

NOTES

7 Wenham, 100 – 101, notes that if the poor brought a burnt offering as well as a purification offering, then wealthier people must have also done something similar. This suggests that the purification offering cleansed the sanctuary of the effects of the sin, while the burnt offering rendered atonement for the offerer.

11 One tenth of an ephah of semolina, also prescribed for grain offerings (6:13; 14:21), is nearly 2.5 quarts (about 2.3 liters) — the essential nourishment for one person for one day (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 306). Milgrom (ibid., 307) also claims that pagan rituals place the purifying "detergent" on people as well as the sanctuary, whereas in the Bible only the sanctuary and its contents were sprinkled with blood. People were never so cleansed (though see Ex 24:1 – 11).

5. The Reparation Offering (5:14 – 6:7 [5:14 – 26])

OVERVIEW

In contrast to the purification offering just described, the reparation offering addresses offenses that involve a financial payment on the part of the one who

commits the deed. Whereas specific examples of the purification offering include matters related to one's word and to cultic uncleanness (5:1 – 4), those of the guilt offering imply the misuse of temple property or a neighbor's property. Because both cases require the offerer to make restitution in addition to a sacrifice, it seems more accurate to designate the guilt offering as a reparation offering. An early and non-Israelite example may occur in 1 Samuel 6, where the Philistines return Israel's ark of the covenant but add additional gifts of gold in order to appease God. Commenting on the three expiatory offerings, Wenham, 111, writes:

> The sacrificial system therefore presents different models or analogies to describe the effects of sin and the way of remedying them. The burnt offering uses a personal picture: of man the guilty sinner who deserves to die for his sin and of the animal dying in his place. God accepts the animal as a ransom for man. The sin offering uses a medical model: sin makes the world so dirty that God can no longer dwell there. The blood of the animal disinfects the sanctuary in order that God may continue to be present with his people. The reparation offering presents a commercial picture of sin. Sin is a debt which man incurs against God. The debt is paid through the offered animal.

This order, in which the reparation offering follows the purifircation offering, is not accidental. In the Decalogue there are prohibitions against misusing the Lord's name and otherwise profaning what belongs to God, as well as making a verbal commitment in marriage and then abandoning it. All of these precede the command not to steal. Property, whether priestly or profane, takes a secondary position to the commands regarding one's word and one's relation with God.

How different this is from other second-millennium BC law collections. For example, the Laws of Hammurabi begin with prohibitions against stealing temple property. The materialistic nature of the cult, as well as the society, made property the first concern in a way that was not the case in ancient Israel. Here the importance of temple and private property is clearly affirmed, but it is not raised to the status of an absolute value as it is elsewhere.

> [14]The LORD said to Moses: [15]"When a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD's holy things, he is to bring to the LORD as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. [16]He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering,

and he will be forgiven. [17]"If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. [18]He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven. [19]It is a guilt offering; he has been guilty of wrongdoing against the LORD."

[6.1]The LORD said to Moses: [2]"If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, [3]or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do — [4]when he thus sins and becomes guilty, he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, [5]or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering. [6]And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, his guilt offering, a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value. [7]In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty."

COMMENTARY

14 Like the introduction of the purification offering in 4:1 (see comments), a note of divine address to Moses sets this offering apart from the first three offerings — the general, all-inclusive ones — and creates a subcategory of purification offering for the purpose of dealing with particular offenses. The description of this offering divides into three offering types according to the nature of the offense: misuse "in regard to any of the LORD's holy things" (5:15 – 16), a general summary statement about the sacrifice of the reparation offering (5:17 – 19), and misuse of a neighbor's property (6:1 – 7).

Reparation Offering

	Temple		

Elements	Property	General	Personal Property
1a Condition of offerer making offering	15 When a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the LORD's holy things, he is to bring to the LORD as a penalty	17 If a person sins and does what is forbidden in any of the LORD's commands, even though he does not know it, he is guilty and will be held responsible. 18 He is to bring to the priest as a guilt offering	2 If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the LORD by deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care or stolen, or if he cheats him, 3 or if he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do – 4a when he thus sins and becomes guilty,6 And as a penalty he must bring to the priest, that is, to the LORD, his guilt offering,
1b Specifircation	a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in sil-ver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering.	a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value.	a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value.
2 Reparation	16He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the		[4b he must return what he has stolen or taken by extortion, or what was entrusted to him, or the lost property he found, 5 or whatever it was he swore falsely about. He must make restitution in full, add a fifth of the value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he

	priest,		presents his guilt offering.]
3 Result	who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven.	In this way the priest will make atonement for him for the wrong he has committed unintentionally, and he will be forgiven.	7 In this way the priest will make atonement for him before the LORD, and he will be forgiven for any of these things he did that made him guilty.

15 The term “commits a violation” derives from an emphatic form of the Hebrew verb *maʿal* (GK 5085). The meaning of this term can suggest any inappropriate activity with regard to something else. Here it specifically concerns the sacrifices and property of the tabernacle and later the temple. An example of this occurs in Joshua 6 – 7, where Achan steals from the booty of Jericho — booty that belonged exclusively to the Lord. In Joshua 7:1 the verb is used of all Israel, who were held guilty by God until the perpetrator was identified and dealt with and the property returned. Just as the spoils of Jericho belonged to God, so do the sacrifices and all the tabernacle and temple items.

The use of a ram (*ʾayil*, GK 380) is something new to the sacrifices in Leviticus, and it is the only animal that can be offered for the reparation offering. But it occurs earlier with sacrifices that Abraham makes in his covenant to God (Ge 15:9) and is offered as a substitute for the sacrifice of Isaac (22:13). Rams are sacrificed in the ordination of the priests (Ex 29; Lev 9). While not as valuable as a bull, the ram still represents a major capital investment by its owner.

Here the value of the animal is determined by an absolute standard so that no one should be forced to pay more than anyone else. The “sanctuary shekel,” at 0.4 ounces in weight, determines the value of every animal. To stipulate this animal as the reparation offering for all offenders, regardless of their financial status, reflects the serious nature of the offense and its absolute criterion for what will satisfy the demand for justice. For the Christian, this is an illustration of how the death of Christ on the cross achieves all the demands of sacrifice for sin, whatever the status of the sinner (2Co 5:14 – 15).

16 The restitution of the violation is set at 20 percent above the cost of the original item. Insofar as the crime is one of theft, it invites comparison with the Book of the Covenant, where all explicit fines are set at double the cost of the original item (Ex 22:4, 7, 9). Is this difference the result of conflicting law collections? More likely it reflects two different attitudes on the part of the thief. In Exodus the thief is caught in the act and found guilty. In Leviticus the person willingly confesses the crime and makes restitution along with an additional expensive offering (Wenham, 109). This smaller payment might provide incentive for the thief to confess. But the cost of the reparation offering itself could easily offset that lure except for thefts of a huge amount.

But why separate these two laws in such different contexts? Perhaps an explanation for the significant reduction in fines lies in the fact, recognized by virtually all, that the laws of Leviticus are later in time than those of the Book of the Covenant. This is true whether that difference in time is one of a few months or years, or one of many centuries. Elements of all of these factors deserve consideration.

Theologically, the difference certainly points to the presence of divine grace in alleviating the harshness of the fines. Despite their justice in the cultural context in which ancient Israel found itself, Israel's God did not deal only with justice toward Israel but with gracious compassion (cf. Hos 11:8 – 9). This gracious quality of God establishes his love for humanity so that he could send his only Son to die on the cross and so that believers would receive not what they deserve but what God's love provides for them (Eph 2:8 – 9).

17 – 20 This section is central to the reparation offering. It falls between crimes against the religious order and crimes against other people. It summarizes the key elements of the reparation offering without adding much that is new. In fact, the only new point made here is that the reparation offering can be used for any transgression of a divine command; it is not limited to those described in the text. This joins the reparation offering with the purification offerings. They are all related to achieving forgiveness and establishing a close relationship with God. But these other violations do not all involve reparations such as those detailed for the reparation offering. As a result there is no discussion of reparations — only of the sacrifice that remains effective.

Verses 17 and 18 are included in the chart, as they compare with the order and form of the other offerings. Verse 19 appears to repeat what has been said earlier; however, it also fills out the envelope or chiastic structure of the description of this offering. Both vv.17 and 19 describe the guilt of the sinner and the need for reparation. Verse 18, which forms the center of the construction and of the entire description of the reparation offering, provides the essential elements from the perspective of the offerer. There is the perfect ram of the necessary value brought by the offerer to the priest. The priest makes atonement, and this is clearly described as forgiveness for the sin committed by the offerer. But it is also specified that the sin is one that is unintentional. This is just like the purification offering (see comment at 4:2). For the use of the word "atonement," compare the burnt offering, which has a similar purpose (1:4). This brings about a new establishment of a full relationship between God and the sinner.

6:1 – 5 The remaining type of reparation offering considers violations and injustices against one's neighbor. The verb that describes how the person "is unfaithful" is identical to the one found in 5:15, where it is translated "commits a violation." Normally this verb is used of wrongs done against God and his sanctuary (see comment on 5:15). But here and in Proverbs 16:10 it describes relations between persons. As is so often the case in legal material, the concern for sins against God is balanced by demands for justice and mercy in the treatment of other people.

These verses describe in much greater detail than for any of the previous sacrifices the possible sins that the reparation offering can address. It is as though the variety of means by which one can cheat another person are detailed so that there will be no excuse or attempt to argue out of the need for the offering and for reparations. Indeed, the text repeats the whole list in 6:4 – 5 and demands full reparation, including the additional 20 percent, for everything there as well (see comment on 5:16).

6 – 7 The remainder of the text adds nothing new to the offering as already described in this section. Like the purification offerings before it, and unlike the sacrifices of chs. 1 – 3, these verses stress atonement as the key purpose of these sacrifices. The reparation offering provides an example of the need to achieve a harmony of relationships with God and with other people. This is the ceremonial

means of teaching the summary of the law found in the two greatest commands: love God and love your neighbor as yourself (Mt 22:36 – 40; Lk 10:25 – 28).

NOTES

14 – 19 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 334) distinguishes between inadvertent sins — those committed consciously (vv.14 – 16) and those without awareness (vv.17 – 19).

14 The Hebrew root behind the name is *ʾšm*. It occurs as a verb (GK 870) and as a noun (GK 871). As a verb it can refer to being guilty. But it also can mean to pay or suffer for one's guilt (Ps 34:21 – 22 [22 – 23]; Pr 30:10; Isa 24:6; Zec 11:5). In other stems it can mean "suffer punishment" (Joel 1:18) and "make a person pay" (Ps 5:10 [11]). As a noun it can mean "guilt," but it can also refer to "a gift of compensation, atonement, or reparation" (1Sa 6:3 – 4, 8, 17; Isa 53:10).

5:15, **18**; **6**:**6** Though some believe that the ram was a symbol of an amount due the sanctuary (Noth, 47; Gerstenberger, 68), the text suggests that the reparation to the victim was over and above the actual ram. But 5:15 implies that the value of the ram could be converted into money and paid to the sanctuary.

15 The phrase "commits a violation" translates *maʿal*(GK 5085). Biblical evidence confirms that any object is subject to sacrilege as soon as it becomes dedicated, even before it is brought to the sanctuary. This as well as other matters regarding the eating of the offerings by priests have parallels with the Hittite practice (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 323 – 24). The fear of the unwitting desecration of sacred things dominates recorded confessions throughout the ancient Near East (ibid., 361 – 63).

The Nuzi texts (fifteenth/fourteenth century BC) provide parallels in which fines could be paid in place of the sacrifice of animals, just as (and only as) with the biblical reparation offering. As recorded in the Bible, at Nuzi the animals specified in the fine remain the same in species and number regardless of the offense (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 328). Therefore, despite the tendency of

some to argue that this offering is a late innovation, it preserves unique provisions that have their closest parallels with sacrificial practices of the middle of the second millennium BC — before the advent of the Mosaic law by anyone's dating. Speiser, 124 – 28, interprets the Hebrew *ʿerkᵉkā*, as "monetary equivalent" or "valuation," wherein the second person pronominal suffix has lost any meaning in a fossilized form.

16 A comparison with the Hittite laws of the Late Bronze Age agrees with the principle of double compensation in some cases, but in others it demands many times the original value of the animal stolen. (See Hoffner, *Laws*; for double repayment, see the law of the stolen ox, §70 [69 – 70]; for an example of multiple compensation, see twelve sheep for a stolen ewe, §69 [69].) Regarding the distinction between so-called earlier and later biblical laws, the Hittite law collection also provides a helpful comparison.

There the fines demanded by the laws distinguish between what was required "earlier" and what is required by a new edition of laws. The later fines always reduce the amount demanded — a reduction as high as 70 percent, close to the reduction from Exodus to Leviticus, and probably more if one considers the additional cost of the ram for an offering in Leviticus (Hoffner, *Laws*, 3 – 5).

17 – 19 Since one would know that the theft of temple property was wrong, the sense of guilt here is that of "feeling guilty" (Wenham, 107 – 8). Note also Ezekiel 18:4 and Jeremiah 31:19 – 22, where the sin and the calamity are not directly connected. Here it involves committing a sin without knowledge.

17 W. Johnstone ("The Use of Leviticus in Chronicles," in *Reading Leviticus: A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. J. F. A. Sawyer [JSOTSup 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996], 247) notes that in v.17 *ma<al* (GK 5085) applies to violating any divine command. But Budd (מעל in Leviticus 5.14 – 19 and Other Sources: Response to William Johnstone," in *Reading Leviticus*: *A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, 258) notes that the term "command" (*miṣvâ*, GK 5184) has a specific usage in 4:2, 13, 22, 27; 27:34. It refers only to offenses that are dealt with by sin offerings.

6:**3** The false oath described here covers all the cases in vv.2 – 3 (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 365). Three different situations appear under the category of

"deceit" (*kḥš*, GK 3951), each introduced by the preposition "in" (*b^{e}ext*): a deposit entrusted for safekeeping that is not returned, a security or loan that is not returned, and a theft (without knowledge of the thief?) (Hartley, 83).

4 The punishment of 20 percent above the value of the object stolen, along with the required sacrifice of a ram, would be significant in itself. But for property valued greater than a ram, it would not match Exodus 22:1 – 4, which requires double, threefold, or fourfold restitution. The difference seems related to the confession of the guilt here, whereas in Exodus the thief is caught (Wenham, 109).

Building on a view that the guilt offering (*ʾāšām*, GK 871) refers to the feeling of guilt, this section refers to a sense of feeling guilty. Thus, the sinner must feel remorse, confess the sin, and make full restitution. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 343 – 45, 373 – 78 (cf. the debate of A. Schenker, "Once Again the Expiatory Sacrifices," *JBL* 116 [1997]: 697 – 99, and Milgrom, "Further on the Expiatory Sacrifices," *JBL* 116 [1996]: 511 – 14). Thus, the literature of Leviticus, i.e., the priestly literature, developed the concept of less punishment for unintentional sins and added that a deliberate offense can be treated as an unintentional sin if there is repentance. Thus sin can be forgiven and the sinner can find relief for all sins.

REFLECTION

In terms of the reparation offering, this passage provides a practical expression of the command to be reconciled with one another before one may expect reconciliation with God (Mt 5:23 – 24; 6:12, 14). It is this doctrine that also forms the basis for the NT theology of forgiveness from sin through confession (1Jn 1:9).As with Leviticus, sacrifice was required. The sacrifice of Christ provided the full payment of blood for all believers (Eph 5:2; Heb 9:26; 10:10).

B. The Offerings from the Priests' Perspective (6:8 – 7:38 [6:1 – 7:38])

OVERVIEW

This section reviews the offerings from the priests' point of view (though 7:11 – 36 addresses the laity [Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 382]) and repeats certain essential laws about the handling of the sacrifice and the portions reserved for the priests; it concludes the instructions concerning sacrifices. For the order of these sacrifices, see Introduction, "Scholarship and Interpretation."

Note the repetition of the divine word being spoken to Moses as a marker for major sections (4:1; 5:14; 6:1, 8, 19, 24; 7:22; Budd, 41).Warning, 57 – 63, 74, observes the structure formed by the twelvefold occurrence of root for "holy" (*qdš*) in 6:8 – 7:21. It is bracketed by the burnt offering and fellowship offering, where "holy" does not occur but "pure, clean" (*ṭāhôr*, GK 3196) does. Between these two, the grain offering, purification offering, and guilt offering use "holy" three, six, and three times, respectively. Further, these three are also designated as "most holy." Throughout all of 6:8 – 7:38, the word for "blood" (*dām*, GK 1947) appears seven times, the first three with reference to placement (6:27, 30; 7:2) and four more times bracketed by references to the fellowship offerings (7:14, 26 – 27, 33).

1. The Burnt Offering (6:8 – 13 [6:1 – 6])

[8]The LORD said to Moses: [9]"Give Aaron and his sons this command: 'These are the regulations for the burnt offering: The burnt offering is to remain on the altar hearth throughout the night, till morning, and the fire must be kept burning on the altar. [10]The priest shall then put on his linen clothes, with linen undergarments next to his body, and shall remove the ashes of the burnt offering that the fire has consumed on the altar and place them beside the altar. [11]Then he is to take off these clothes and put on others, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a place that is ceremonially clean. [12]The fire on the altar must be kept burning; it must not go out. Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire and burn the fat of the fellowship offerings on it. [13]The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.

COMMENTARY

8 This passage is similar to 1:3 – 17. As in 1:3 and elsewhere, the record of God's speaking to Moses signals a new section. Here it introduces more than another sacrifice; it begins a new set of descriptions on sacrifices that have already received attention.

9 On the address to Aaron and his sons, the priests, see the overviews to this section and to Leviticus 1 – 7. Four terms are used for the first time in Leviticus: "Give . . . command," "regulations for," "altar hearth," and "must be kept burning." The instruction to "command" (Heb. root *s.wh*, GK 7422) introduces a stronger injunction than has been previously used. Nowhere are the Israelites "commanded"; God simply "tells" them how they should sacrifice. But the priests bear the responsibility of overseeing the altar and all the sacrifices that take place there. They bear the guilt if something is done amiss. Thus, God uses a stronger expression to emphasize the importance of their responsibility.

The NIV translates the expression "law/instruction of " (*tôrat*, GK 9368) as "regulations for." It emphasizes that these instructions will enable the offering to fulfill its intended purpose. This is the first occurrence of this term since Exodus

24. It positions the sacrificial ceremonies on a level with the Book of the Covenant and the other laws that appear in Exodus 12 – 23.

The word “altar hearth” (*môqᶜdâ*, GK 4612) occurs only here in the Bible. Its root meaning, “to burn” (Hiphil of *yqd*), uses a noun to identify where it occurs — i.e., a place of burning, a pyre or altar. The customary word for “altar” is *miz-bça*^{ḥ} (GK 4640), from the root *zbḥ*,. “to slaughter, butcher.” The altar is a place of slaughter. But in the case of the burnt offering the total burning of the sacrifice also becomes important. This may explain the unusual use of the noun here.

The root of the passive form “must be kept burning” is identical to the root for “altar hearth.” It occurs eleven times in the Hebrew Bible. Its three occurrences in Leviticus appear in this section on the burnt offering (vv.12 – 13 [5 – 6]). These emphasize the importance of the burnt offering as one in which the entire animal is offered to God, which represents its total dedication to God. In addition to the vocabulary already discussed, the requirements for the offering to remain on a continually burning altar throughout the whole night satisfy this demand.

10 The priest wears linen (*bad*, GK 965) garments and only this type of clothing, first described as being made for the priests in Exodus 28:42; 39:28. Samuel also wore a linen garment at the tabernacle (1Sa 2:18), and David wore linen when he performed activities related to the priesthood and the ark of the covenant (2Sa 6:14; 1Ch 15:27). Finally, divine messengers were clothed with linen (Eze 9; Da 10:5; 12:6 – 7). Thus linen associates the wearer with a special position before God — often a priestly one and in some cases a position related to sacred objects.

The word for “ashes” (*dešen*, GK 2016) has already appeared in Leviticus (1:16; 4:12) with the meaning “fat.” It normally describes the fat of animals but can also describe the ashes from the altar that remain after the fat has burned away. Here it preserves the memory that these ashes have a special association with the fat dedicated entirely to God. Thus they require special treatment. Their removal from the altar necessitates a priest clad in special linen garments. Because God receives the burnt offering at the altar, it possesses a special holiness and requires particular respect.

11 Once the priest has removed the ashes from the altar, he need not wear linen clothes, for he has moved away from that special holy place. Indeed, the priest dare not wear the linen garments because they remain special for those close to the holy things. Leaving the holy area of the tabernacle and even the special sanctity of the encampment of Israel, the priest must wear garments that have no association with the special holiness of the place where God chooses to dwell among his people.

As in 4:12 and 21 the ashes cannot be stored in the camp, because they are holy and would require a larger and larger place as sacrifices continued generation after generation. Further, their association is both with God at the altar and also with the sin of the offerer. This lends them an ambiguous status. They do not belong in the tabernacle or even in the camp of Israel, if the nation is to preserve its sanctity before the Lord; they belong away from the camp. But they must not touch anything unclean because they symbolize the special attachment with the God of Israel. A clean place outside the camp satisfies these requirements.

12 – 13 These verses stress the continual burning of the fire on the altar of burnt offering. The reference to the arrangement of materials and to wood on the altar suggests the burnt offering (1:7, 12). The explicit mention of fellowship offerings also associates this altar with that offering. The continual burning implies the special character of the fire and anticipates the violation of this instruction in Leviticus 10. Its repetition at the beginning of 6:12 and throughout v.13 suggests an envelope construction in which the emphasis on the arrangement of the pieces of the burnt and fellowship offerings every morning forms the chiastic center. This is the key to the continual presence of fire on the altar. It signifies the continual presence of offerings of atonement and worship toward God. This implies the continual acceptance and gracious relationship of God with his people every day throughout their history.

NOTES

9 Hartley, 88 – 89, noting that other Hebrew manuscripts have “burning” (*mqdh*), the Samaritan Pentateuch has “that which is burning” (*hmqdh*), and the LXX has “its burning” (*mwqdh*), follows Elliger, 81, in omitting the preceding

preposition ('<*al*), based on the conclusion that it represents a dittography, and in identifying an original "which is burning" (*hyqdh*). But there is no textual support for this, and the practice of referring to items piled up on the altar has precedent (cf. 1:8, 12, 17; 3:5).

10 Linen helps prevent perspiration (Eze 44:18).

13 For Keil, 318, the continual fire was a sign of uninterrupted worship; for Wenham, 120, it stressed the constant need for atonement. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 389) comments:

> The sacrifices offered up at the inauguration of the public cult were consumed miraculously by a divine fire (9:24) and it is *this* fire which is not allowed to die out so that all subsequent sacrifices might claim divine acceptance.

In Heb 7:25 we are reminded that, like the fire, Christ now always lives to make intercession for us.

REFLECTION

With respect to a clean place outside the camp for the ashes, the book of Hebrews relates the bodies of the burnt and purification offerings destroyed by the priests outside the camp with the body of Christ who suffered outside the city of Jerusalem (Heb 13:11 – 13). Both the animals and Jesus Christ provide atonement for the people of God. Yet the writer also invites his fellow believers to join Christ on the cross outside the camp and remain faithful to their beliefs even if it means suffering with him.

2. The Grain Offering (6:14 – 23 [6:7 – 16])

> 14“ ‘These are the regulations for the grain offering: Aaron’s sons are to bring it before the LORD, in front of the altar. 15The priest is to take a handful of fine flour and oil, together with all the incense on the grain offering, and burn the memorial portion on the altar as an aroma pleasing to

the LORD. [16]Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it, but it is to be eaten without yeast in a holy place; they are to eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. [17]It must not be baked with yeast; I have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire. Like the sin offering and the guilt offering, it is most holy. [18]Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it. It is his regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire for the generations to come. Whatever touches them will become holy.' "

[19]The LORD also said to Moses, [20]"This is the offering Aaron and his sons are to bring to the LORD on the day he is anointed: a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a regular grain offering, half of it in the morning and half in the evening. [21]Prepare it with oil on a griddle; bring it well-mixed and present the grain offering broken in pieces as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [22]The son who is to succeed him as anointed priest shall prepare it. It is the LORD's regular share and is to be burned completely. [23]Every grain offering of a priest shall be burned completely; it must not be eaten."

COMMENTARY

14 – 15 These verses introduce the grain offering and summarize the instructions of Leviticus 2 with respect to its composition and the handful that is offered as a "memorial portion."

16 – 18 The remainder of the first paragraph of instructions for the grain offering specifies the conditions of who may eat the portion not offered, how it is to be eaten, and where it is to be eaten. These verses form a chiastic structure:

A Who — "Aaron and his sons shall eat the rest of it,"

B How — "but it is to be eaten without yeast"

C Where — "in a holy place;"

C' Where —"they are to eat it in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting."

B’ How — “It must not be baked with yeast; I have given it as their share of the offerings made to me by fire. Like the purification offering and the guilt offering, it is most holy.”

A’ Who — “Any male descendant of Aaron may eat it. It is his regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire for the generations to come. Whoever touches it will become holy.”

This structure stresses that only the priests may eat the offering. Those who perform the sacrifice receive their share of the offering. That it is eaten without yeast reflects its nature as something set apart for the service of the Lord. All grain offerings given to God were to be without yeast. The significance of the absence of yeast goes back to the Passover and the hurried departure from Egypt when there was no time to add yeast and wait for the bread to rise (Ex 12:15, 34, 39; Dt 16:3).

Finally, it is eaten in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. This is a holy place dedicated to God so that the food, once brought to the place of sacrifice, remains there. Also, it is a visible place so that the remainder of the congregation can see that the offering is properly consumed.

In vv.17 – 18 both the unleavened bread and the priests (alone worthy of eating the offering) have two notes attached. In each case the first note designates the priests’ share and forbids it to others. The second note, also the same in both verses, observes that the offering is holy. Verse 17 uses the superlative, “most holy.” This further identifies the eaters as only the ordained priests. These individuals have been sanctified by God and therefore may eat the food.

That God regards his people as special and therefore responsible in matters that might not be readily apparent to the modern reader remains true into the NT. There is freedom for the Christian regarding what may be eaten, but at the same time early Christians abstained from foods connected with idolatrous practices (Ro 14).

19 – 23 This additional note regarding the grain offering says that the priest must offer it on the day of his ordination. The offering consists of the same

amount as the purification offering — about two quarts of grain, a standard measure for a grain offering.

The priest shall offer half in the morning and half in the evening on the day of his ordination. The grain offering expresses thanks and praise for God's gracious provision of food and other blessings of life. Its offering here expresses praise to God for his appointment of a priest to act on behalf of Israel. God's people will not lack a mediator. God will provide one. This then explains the emphasis on the presumed successor of the priest also ordained on that day and given the role of preparing the grain offering. It guarantees the preservation of a line of priests so that no one may doubt whether the priestly service will end. Further, it anticipates issues of succession by recognizing in advance the next in the line of priests to serve at the altar of God.

In contrast to the instructions in Leviticus 2, the whole grain offering of a priest is burnt. Nothing remains for the priests to eat. Because this offering comes from the priest, it must be given away; otherwise it is not an offering. The total burning of the offering expresses that no one else can eat from it; it belongs entirely to God.

NOTES

16 Hartley, 89, observes that the second half of the verse has a chiastic structure. Levine, 37 (cf. Rooker, 130) identifies the "courtyard" (*hāṣēr* [GK 2958], only here and in 6:26) with the more common "entrance to the Tent of Meeting."

18 The NIV renders *ḥōq ʿôlām* (GK 2976, 6409) as "regular share" (cf. Levine, 37). But the traditional "eternal statute" is preferable (cf. 3:17; 7:36; 17:7; Hartley, 89). Levine, 37 – 38, 40, renders the last verb as a description of the purification offering: "it is holy." Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 443 – 56) applies the verb to the person touching it, so that the person "becomes holy." Holiness has an effect on the person who encounters it.

20 A tenth of an ephah is nearly 2.5 quarts or 2.3 liters (5:11; Nu 28:5).

21 As allowed for some grain offerings, it may be baked on a flat plate. According to 2:5 – 6 it must be crumbled on the plate before being offered. This may explain the unusual word that is translated "(the grain offering) broken (in pieces)" (*tupînîm*, GK 9519). Derivations from "bake" (*ʾāpâ*, GK 684) or "to fold" (*pnn/pwn*; J. H. van Leeuwen, "The Meaning of *tuphîn* in Lev 6, 14," *ZAW* 100 [1988]: 268) are unproven. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 400), noting the Akkadian cognate with the meaning of a cereal preparation and the Hittite meaning of barley bread, does not try to translate the word. But the Hebrew *pittîm* as meaning "(crumbled) pieces" is clear.

REFLECTION

In the NT, Hebrews stresses the continual need for the high priest of Israel to offer sacrifices (Heb 9:6; 10:1). This is replaced by the sacrifice of Christ once and for all (7:27).Yet there remains the opportunity for the Christians to offer continual sacrifices of praise to God (13:15) — a parallel to the purpose of the grain offering.

3. The Purification Offering (6:24 – 30 [6:17 – 23])

[24]The LORD said to Moses, [25]"Say to Aaron and his sons: 'These are the regulations for the sin offering: The sin offering is to be slaughtered before the LORD in the place the burnt offering is slaughtered; it is most holy. [26]The priest who offers it shall eat it; it is to be eaten in a holy place, in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting. [27]Whatever touches any of the fl esh will become holy, and if any of the blood is spattered on a garment, you must wash it in a holy place. [28]The clay pot the meat is cooked in must be broken; but if it is cooked in a bronze pot, the pot is to be scoured and rinsed with water. [29]Any male in a priest's family may eat it; it is most holy. [30]But any sin offering whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting to make atonement in the Holy Place must not be eaten; it must be burned.

COMMENTARY

24 – 26, **29** The description of the purification offering (cf. 4:1 – 5:13) includes instructions reminiscent of the grain offering. In both, the priests must eat their portion "in the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting."

27 – 28 The new material in this description includes the principle that anything that the meat or blood of the purification offering touches becomes holy (see comment on 6:18; Budd, 115). This includes garments that come in contact with blood and pots that contain the meat that the priests cook and eat. Washing the garments provides a means for sanctifying them. Earlier at Mount Sinai it was associated with the consecration of the people (Ex 19:14). As for the smashing of the clay pots and the washing of the bronze pots, this provides purification.

30 The exclusion of the animal offerings whose blood is brought into the Tent of Meeting from the priestly diet includes the bulls for the purification offerings of the anointed priest and the community of Israel. Presumably, the act of taking the blood into the Tent of Meeting (4:5, 16) reflects the special gravity of the transgression for which the priest or the congregation seeks forgiveness. The animal that provides the blood symbolically carries that offense and cannot serve as food for anyone. It must be completely burned.

NOTES

26 The sacrificial offerings that remain belong to the priests. This was common practice throughout the ancient world, as is attested in fourth-century Phoenician/Punic Marseilles and Carthage tariffs (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 402; Noth, 60; cf. Gerstenberger, 88, who also notes that the breast and thigh are included; for a structural comparison with Leviticus 1 – 7, cf. David W. Baker, "Leviticus 1 – 7 and the Punic Tariffs: A Form Critical Comparison," *ZAW* 99 [1987]: 188 – 97). D. Kidner (*Sacrifice in the Old Testament* [London: Tyndale, 1952], 21; cf. Hartley, 98) observes that the requirement for the officiating priest to eat some of the offering may provide a picture of God's acceptance of the offering, where the priest represents God.

27 That clay pots might absorb the holy things they contain requires their destruction, as in Hittite and Indian rituals (Wright, 93 – 113; Budd, 116).

4. The Reparation Offering (7:1 – 6)

> [1]" 'These are the regulations for the guilt offering, which is most holy:
> [2]The guilt offering is to be slaughtered in the place where the burnt offering
> is slaughtered, and its blood is to be sprinkled against the altar on all sides.
> [3]All its fat shall be offered: the fat tail and the fat that covers the inner parts,
> [4]both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the covering of the
> liver, which is to be removed with the kidneys. [5]The priest shall burn them
> on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is a guilt offering.
> [6]Any male in a priest's family may eat it, but it must be eaten in a holy
> place; it is most holy.

COMMENTARY

1 As with all the offerings in this set, the introduction specifies the "regulations" in regard to the particular offering concerned (cf. 5:14 – 6:7). The word "regulations" translates the Hebrew for "law, instruction" (*tôrâ*; GK 9368). This is not the only offering that is described by the superlative "most holy." Note this expression with other especially sacred offerings (burnt, 2:3; grain, 6:3[10]; and purification, 6:11[18]). This reparation offering is the only offering that stipulates restitution, either to the sanctuary or to any person offended. Thus the offering satisfies not only the divine disapproval that some of the other offerings may deal with, but it also restores a measure of justice and equity in the material world and in dealings with others. This twofold emphasis recalls the concern to love God and one's neighbor already applied to this offering (cf. 5:16; 6:4 – 7; 19:18).

2 The phrase "blood to be sprinkled against the altar" occurs in eighteen verses in the Bible, including four times in Exodus (24:6; 29: 16, 20 [2x]) and eleven times in Leviticus (1:11; 3:2, 8, 13; 7:2; 8:19, 24; 9:12; 17:6). It has already appeared with reference to the burnt offering and the fellowship offering. Here it applies to the reparation offering. The sprinkling of blood against the

altar forms one method of purifying the altar and preparing it for the offering of the animal, which is then burned on top of the sacred place.

3 – 5 The significance of the fat as the best part of the animal has been noted above (1:8). The "fat tail" receives pride of place in its mention as it provides the tastiest part of the ram. But no mention of it appeared in the more extended injunctions on the reparation offering in 5:14 – 6:7 [5:14 – 26]. It occurred earlier in the fellowship offering (3:9), and the later offerings seem to assume it. It reappears here in instructions that deal with the fat; 7:3 – 4 list all the fat parts of the animal that the fire of the offering must consume (v.5).

6 As already observed in this set of directions designed for the priests or potential priests, "any male in a priest's family" may eat the remaining meat of the sacrifice. Again the priests eat their meal in a holy place, presumably the courtyard of the Tent of Meeting, though there is no specification as for the grain offering (6:16[9]) and the purification offering (6:26[19]). The concluding observation about this offering, "it is most holy," forms an envelope with the same note in v.1 and further emphasizes the unique significance of this offering.

This pinpoints a key theme of Leviticus: the holiness of God and the divine call for God's people to follow in that holiness. This theme is found especially in Leviticus (11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8), but it continues in the NT (1Pe 1:15 – 16).

NOTE

1 – 6 Hartley, 99, notes the close similarity with the ritual for the purification offering, with the exception here of dashing (*zrq*, GK 2450) the blood against the altar rather than sprinkling (*nzh*, GK 5684) it.

5. The Offering Remains That Belong to the Priests: A Summary (7:7 – 10)

[7]" 'The same law applies to both the sin offering and the guilt offering:
They belong to the priest who makes atonement with them. [8]The priest who

offers a burnt offering for anyone may keep its hide for himself. [9]Every grain offering baked in an oven or cooked in a pan or on a griddle belongs to the priest who offers it, [10]and every grain offering, whether mixed with oil or dry, belongs equally to all the sons of Aaron.

COMMENTARY

7 – 10 This text summarizes the offerings that provide food for the priests. Thus it links the purification offering and the reparation offering. Both assign to the priests meat not consumed by the offering fire. Because the burnt offering consumes everything edible in the sacrifice, nothing remains to eat. But this text allows the priests to use the skin of the animal — something that remains after the fire has consumed the meat. Finally, the grain offerings that remain after the handfuls of flour (or their already-baked equivalent) have been offered belong to the priests for food. This summary emphasizes the importance of the priestly share for each offering.

The fellowship offering is unique and therefore is described separately in the section that follows. But this summary text reflects the concern that the priests have food. They receive no agricultural lands for their own families in the Promised Land, except those attached to the Levitical towns (Jos 21). Instead, their main source of food comes through their ministry and work at the altar.

Even so, the primary concern in these texts is not how to feed the priests. If that were so, provision would exist for the wives and daughters of the priests. Rather, the mediatorial role of the priesthood puts them in a unique position — one that their ordination creates. They receive portions of what belongs to God. The priests themselves belong to God in a special way and so may eat of this food that God has received as an offering. This brings us to the fellowship offering that describes how anyone in the community of Israel may experience a similarly special relationship of sharing in what God has received in an offering.

6. The Fellowship Offering (7:11 – 34)

OVERVIEW

The discussion of this offering (cf. ch. 3) divides into three sections. The first concerns matters related directly to the fellowship offering: the cakes brought along with the offering so that the priests will receive something (vv.12 – 14), details about when the offerer must eat the meat offering (vv.15 – 17), and problems with unclean meat (vv.18 – 21). The second section addresses those parts of any meat meal that no one may eat — the fat and the blood (vv.22 – 27). The last section deals with meat portions of the fellowship offering that belong to the priests (vv.28 – 34). This returns the discussion to the priests and their portions and thus prepares for the concluding summary regarding this set of laws for the sacrifices — a set of laws that especially concerns the priests.

11“ ‘These are the regulations for the fellowship offering a person may
present to the LORD:
12“ ‘If he offers it as an expression of thankfulness, then along with this
thank offering he is to offer cakes of bread made without yeast and mixed
with oil, wafers made without yeast and spread with oil, and cakes of fine
flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil. 13Along with his fellowship offering
of thanksgiving he is to present an offering with cakes of bread made with
yeast. 14He is to bring one of each kind as an offering, a contribution to the
LORD; it belongs to the priest who sprinkles the blood of the fellowship
offerings. 15The meat of his fellowship offering of thanksgiving must be
eaten on the day it is offered; he must leave none of it till morning.
16“ ‘If, however, his offering is the result of a vow or is a freewill
offering, the sacrifice shall be eaten on the day he offers it, but anything left
over may be eaten on the next day. 17Any meat of the sacrifice left over till
the third day must be burned up. 18If any meat of the fellowship offering is
eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted. It will not be credited to the
one who offered it, for it is impure; the person who eats any of it will be
held responsible.
19“ ‘Meat that touches anything ceremonially unclean must not be eaten;
it must be burned up. As for other meat, anyone ceremonially clean may eat
it. 20But if anyone who is unclean eats any meat of the fellowship offering
belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people. 21If
anyone touches something unclean — whether human uncleanness or an
unclean animal or any unclean, detestable thing — and then eats any of the

meat of the fellowship offering belonging to the LORD, that person must be cut off from his people.’ ”

22The LORD said to Moses, 23“Say to the Israelites: ‘Do not eat any of the fat of cattle, sheep or goats. 24The fat of an animal found dead or torn by wild animals may be used for any other purpose, but you must not eat it. 25Anyone who eats the fat of an animal from which an offering by fire may be made to the LORD must be cut off from his people. 26And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal. 27If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people.’”

28The Lord said to Moses, 29“Say to the Israelites: ‘Anyone who brings a fellowship offering to the Lord is to bring part of it as his sacrifice to the Lord. 30With his own hands he is to bring the offering made to the Lord by fire; he is to bring the fat, together with the breast, and wave the breast before the Lord as a wave offering. 31The priest shall burn the fat on the altar, but the breast belongs to Aaron and his sons. 32You are to give the right thigh of your fellowship offerings to the priest as a contribution. 33The son of Aaron who offers the blood and the fat of the fellowship offering shall have the right thigh as his share. 34From the fellowship offerings of the Israelites, I have taken the breast that is waved and the thigh that is presented and have given them to Aaron the priest and his sons as their regular share from the Israelites.’ ”

COMMENTARY

12 – 14 For the first time the fellowship offering envisions cakes as well as meat, specifically as thanksgiving offerings. The cakes of v.12 are unleavened and made in the manner described for the grain offering; they include oil (2:1). The cakes of v.13 are “of bread made with yeast.” Only here in the Bible is this term used. It is unusual to have yeast as part of an offering to the Lord; nevertheless, it further symbolizes the entirety of the produce of the land, which God has given to Israel. Both types of cakes, leavened and unleavened, belong to the Lord as an offering and to the priests for food.

In the NT leaven often symbolizes something that begins in a small way and spreads. Most of the time this describes some sort of evil (Mt 16:6, 11 – 12; Mk 8:15; Lk 12:1; 1Co 5:6 – 8), but sometimes it describes something positive, such

as the kingdom of heaven (Mt 13:33; Lk 13:21). In the same manner, the prototype of leaven in the sacrifices of the OT most often must be avoided; but occasionally it forms part of a legitimate offering.

15 – 17 The text assumes that, in addition to the thanksgiving offering, offerings for vows and freewill offerings allow the offerers to participate by eating from what they offered to the Lord. All of these fellowship offerings reserve food for the offerer. But the offerer must eat the meat on the same day as the offering. The meal serves as a symbol of this fellowship with God; therefore, God and the offerer should eat at the same time, not days apart.

Vows and freewill offerings appear to form a subcategory of fellowship offerings. Vows have not appeared before in connection with offerings (cf. Ge 28:20; 31:13). The gifts that Israelites brought to use for building the tabernacle were freewill offerings (Ex 35:29; 36:3). Vow offerings and freewill offerings in Leviticus become burnt offerings but may also preserve meat that the offerer eats. Since, however, the text emphasizes thankfulness for something accomplished (vows) or simply gifts (freewill offerings), the demands for eating the offering relax. The offerer can eat the meat over a period of two days, allowing for much greater flexibility in terms of where and with whom the offerer eats. After this, as with the fellowship offering after the first day, any remaining meat is consigned to the flames.

As Harrison, 80, observes (cf. Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, “Spirituality in Offering a Peace Offering,” *TynBul* 50 [1999]: 23 – 31), the underlying concern for the expression of gratitude toward God motivates these fellowship offerings. Gratitude is endorsed in the NT as well (Eph 5:20; Php 4:6; Col 4:2).

18 The text gives as the reason for the above regulations the term “impure” (*piggûl*, GK 7002). But this term does not appear in the discussion of unclean foods in Leviticus 11; instead, it occurs only three other times. In 19:7 it refers to the same regulations as here. In Isaiah 65:4, in the context of wayward Israel, it refers to those who eat the meat of pigs and whose vessels hold impure meat. In Ezekiel 4:14, it describes dead and torn animals. Thus the term associates unclean animals and their meat. Though Isaiah 65:4 may allow for an exception, explicit statements about the uncleanness of the animals imply that it occurs because of their deaths or the treatment of the meat, not because the animals fall

into this category.

19 – 21 These verses also consider unclean matters concerning the meat. But this uncleanness differs from that of v.18 and uses a different term (ṭāmē᾽, GK 3238). It customarily describes uncleanness, whether of various types of animals or in terms of objects and people who may become unclean. The subject of these verses considers uncleanness, whether the meat touches something unclean (v.19) or an unclean person eats the meat of the fellowship offering (vv.20 – 21). Leviticus 11 – 15, 17 – 18, and 21 outline major areas in which a person can become unclean. If the meat touches something unclean, no one can eat it. Fire must destroy it.

The unclean person who attempts to eat something that God has received as an offering also faces a judgment of destruction. The text describes it as "that person must be cut off from his people." This phrase occurs twice in these verses and emphasizes judgment. The expression appears fourteen times in the OT (nine in Leviticus). Earlier God warned Abraham that this fate awaited any of his family who remained uncircumcised (Ge 17:14), and the law applied this penalty to Sabbath breakers (Ex 31:14). In Exodus the phrases occur in parallel with a formula for capital punishment. Thus this expression means death for any Israelite who presumes on God's holiness — a conclusion confirmed by later occurrences with additional capital crimes.

22 – 27 This second section repeats and develops the prohibition of eating fat and blood. Insofar as the fat of cattle, sheep, and goats constitutes an essential part of every animal sacrifice, no Israelite may eat it. Nor can the fat of torn or dead animals serve as food. For one thing, Leviticus will declare that nothing of these animals is clean, and so the Israelites cannot eat them (17:15; 22:8). Further, dead and torn animals have not been properly butchered, so their blood has not completely drained.

The blood prohibition extends beyond the animals sacrificed in the Holy Place to Israelite homes. This prohibition began at the time of Noah in God's covenant with him after the flood (Ge 9:4). It continued into the early church when the Jerusalem Council listed it among items that Gentile converts were to avoid (Ac 15:29).

28 – 34 The instructions on the fellowship offering conclude with a note on the part of the animal that belongs to the priest. The breast of the animal (ḥāzeh, GK 2601) is mentioned here. It also appears as the part of the animal that is the priests' portion at the priestly ordination, where it functions as an elevation offering (Ex 29:26 – 27; Lev 8:29; 9:20 – 21). The elevation offering (tᵉnûpâ, GK 9485) was a means of making a gift to God and the sanctuary of anything of value. In addition to the animal breast the (tᵉnûpâ, could include gold (Ex 35:22; 38:24), bronze (38:29), and bread and sheaves (Lev 23:17, 20), and it could even serve as a symbol of God's anger and warfare (Isa 19:16; 30:32).

Offering an object by elevating it before the sanctuary and altar provides a means of presenting it as a gift to the Lord. The breast of the animal of the fellowship offering belongs to the Lord, but the priests receive it as a gift for their ser vices. In addition, the officiating priest receives the animal's right thigh. This part of the animal also appears in the descriptions of priestly ordination, where it belongs to the priests (Ex 29:22; Lev 8:25 – 26; 9:21).

The connection with the ordination is not accidental. The act of ordination establishes these two parts of the sacrificed animal as priestly property. This will remain true of all sacrifices. Those that are not entirely consumed by flames (burnt offering) or whose remaining meat is not largely reserved for the priests (guilt and purification offerings) must have their breast and right thigh given to the priests.

NOTES

12 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 412) suggests that the original name for this type of fellowship offering is a sacrifice of thanksgiving. He refers to the rabbinic observation that this offering is never brought for sin, so "in the world to come all sacrifices will be annulled, but that of the thanksgiving will not be annulled" (*Lev. Rab.* 9:7).

14 Unlike the elevation offering (tᵉnûpâ, GK 9485), which is dedicated to the Lord in the sanctury, the "contribution" (tᵉrûmâ, GK 9556) may be dedicated outside the sanctuary by an oral statement (Jdg 17:3) or by handing it to the priest (Nu 18:24). Both are means of giving a gift to God. The "contribution" is

not an “elevation offering” but rather one of dedication (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 415, 461 – 81).

15 – 17 The Passover (Ex 12:7 – 10), the manna (Ex 16:19), and festival food (Ex 23:14 – 18; 34:25; Dt 16:4) also had to be eaten on the same day (Rooker, 134).

18 Exceeding the time limit for consuming the food renders it “impure” either because the law so pronounces it (Wright, 140 – 43) or because it becomes rotten (Wenham, 124). If the former, the latter is certainly implied (contra Budd, 121).

20 The punishment of being cut off from a person’s people is applied in nineteen cases. The punishments are administered by God rather than Israel (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 458). Knohl and Naeh (“Studies in the Priestly Torah: Lev 7:19 – 21,” in *The Bible in Light of Its Interpreters,* ed. S. Japhet [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994], 601 – 12), attaching v.20 to v.19 rather than v.21, argue that the verse refers to unclean meat rather than an unclean eater. This would also be the case in 22:3.

23 The terms here describe both sexes of cattle, sheep, and goats — the common animals that Israel herded (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 427).

28 – 36 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16,* 434) observes that the gift of the thigh and breast from God to the priests belongs to the ancient Shiloh traditon.

30 This is the first occurrence in Leviticus of the Hebrew תְּנוּפָה, (GK 9485), traditionally, “wave offering” (Delbert Hillers, “Ugaritic *šnpt* ‘Wave-Offering,’” *BASOR* 198 [1970]: 142; 200 [1970]: 18), but Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16,* 461 – 73, and earlier literature) contends for the meaning “elevation offering,” citing ancient examples of the lifting of an offering before a deity. S. R. Driver (“Three Technical Terms”) and G. W. Anderson (*Sacrifices and Offerings in Ancient Israel: Studies in their Social and Political Importance* [HSS 41; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987], 133 – 34) find an Akkadian cognate *nup*m *tu* and translate it as “additional payment.” The defense of “wave offering” on the basis of the Ugaritic cognate *šnpt* cannot carry much weight because of the uncertainty of the translation in Ugaritic.

35 As in Ugaritic, the Hebrew preposition *b*^{e}carries the meaning “from.”

7. Conclusion of the Offerings from the Priests’ Perspective (7:35 – 36)

> [35]This is the portion of the offerings made to the LORD by fire that were allotted to Aaron and his sons on the day they were presented to serve the LORD as priests. [36]On the day they were anointed, the LORD commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their regular share for the generations to come.

COMMENTARY

35 – 36 These two verses conclude the account begun at 6:8 dealing with the offerings in terms of the priests — their responsibilities and privileges in receiving portions of the offerings. The word “portion” (*miš*^{h}*â,* GK 5418) occurs twenty-four times in the Bible, though only twice with this meaning; the other occurrence with this meaning also describes the portions of the sacrifices that the priests eat (Nu 18:8). Everywhere else it refers to anointing oil used in the tabernacle (its root is the same as that of “anointed”). Here it refers to a specially dedicated portion that only the (anointed) priests receive, and they must eat it within the sanctuary on holy ground. Every sacrifice described in this section includes a portion for the priests; therefore, this text concludes the whole of the sacrificial regulations especially designed for the priests.

As chs. 8 – 9 make clear, God established these sacrifices on the day of the priests’ anointing, but the regulations apply to the priests forever. Thus the anointed “portion” relates to the anointing of the priests and reminds everyone who offers at the altar of this fact. It recognizes their special role throughout all generations and requires all Israel to treat the priests with special respect. Note the chiastic structure of these verses:

A “This is the portion of the offerings made to the LORD by fire that were allotted to Aaron and his sons”

B “on the day they were presented to serve the LORD as priests.”

B’ “On the day they were anointed,”

A’ “the LORD commanded that the Israelites give this to them as their regular share for the generations to come.”

This structure demonstrates the importance of the anointed role of the priests. It then relates this to the offerings dedicated to the priests as part of what the Lord himself receives and as divinely commanded. The NT draws on this principle to make a case for the right of ministers of the gospels to receive pay from those whom they serve (1Co 9:7 – 14; 1Ti 5:17 – 18).

8. Conclusion to the Offerings (7:37 – 38)

> 37These, then, are the regulations for the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the ordination offering and the fellowship offering, 38which the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai on the day he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the LORD, in the Desert of Sinai.

COMMENTARY

37 – 38 This passage recounts the various offerings God instructs the Israelites to present to the Lord. Of the offerings listed, only the “ordination offering” (*millu'im*, GK 4854) does not appear in the first seven chapters of Leviticus. The term refers to the ordination of the priests and occurs in Exodus 29:22, 26 – 27, 31, 34; Leviticus 8:22, 28 – 29, 31, 33. It describes the ordination offerings that are mentioned in the discussion of the fellowship offering in 7:11 – 21, 28 – 34. Though this term does not occur there, it clearly describes this sort of offering, as the connections already noted between these texts have suggested.

The order of offerings follows that of the second group of offerings, where the fellowship offering occurs last. But its connection with the adjacent ordination offering anticipates offerings of this sort in the next two chapters, which deal specifically with the ordination of the priests.

That these were given to Moses on Mount Sinai establishes the unshakable authority of these regulations regarding the sacrifices. They proceed from God to the authorized lawgiver, Moses, at the time of God's making of a covenant with Israel at Sinai. The command may refer to a specific event on a particular day. If so, it is probably the beginning of the priestly ministry in Leviticus 9.

The expression "on the day" may refer to the general period of time when Israel received these regulations and began to offer sacrifices. But the first example of this event, after the building of the tabernacle, takes place in the succeeding two chapters with the ordination of the priests and the sacrifices of the people. In any case, the reference here anticipates the events of Leviticus 9 and thus provides a literary and theological connection. The sacrifices that have been described can now be offered to the Lord.

Thus after completing the tabernacle construction (Ex 25 – 40), the regulations regarding the offerings prepare Israel for its worship of the true God. They provide means to seek forgiveness from sin, remove guilt, celebrate blessings, rejoice in fellowship with God, and ordain the priests who serve as indispensable mediators of the sacrifices.

NOTES

37 – 38 Harrison, 84 – 86, designates these verses as a "colophon," similar to that found at the conclusion of cuneiform tablets in ancient Near Eastern literature. Similar to the latter, the Leviticus texts provide a summary of the material (chs. 1 – 7) and identify the author as well as some details regarding the writing of the material.

37 No offering of ordination has been described in chs. 6 – 7, unlike the case with the other sacrifices mentioned here (Levine, 47). But a combination of the offerings detailed in the first seven chapters will be used for ordination in chs. 8 – 9.

II. THE ORDINATION AND SER VICE OF THE PRIESTS (8:1 – 10:20)

OVERVIEW

If Leviticus 1 – 7 describe the procedures for the offerings, Leviticus 8 – 10 apply these procedures to the priesthood and the people. The earlier chapters set out the necessary regulations and explanations of the sacrifices. The next step involves the ordination of the priests, who will from that day forward perform the sacrifices.

In addition, these texts relate to the last half of Exodus and its description of the various implements, clothing, and materials for the sacrificial ceremonies involved in the offerings. In these chapters, more than elsewhere in Leviticus, the text assumes and builds on the descriptions of Exodus 25 – 40 regarding the construction of the tabernacle, the ceremonial items in the tabernacle, and the wardrobe of the priests.

A clear line of thought develops from the initial revelation at Mount Sinai (Ex 19 – 24) through the instructions for the holy objects and priests (Ex 25 – 30), the building and consecration of those items (Ex 35 – 40), the instructions for the sacrifices (Lev 1 – 7), and the creation and consecration of the priests and the offerings (Lev 8 – 9). The sins listed in Exodus 31 – 34 and Leviticus 10 do not merely interrupt an ideal procedure and demonstrate human fallibility, they also prove the need for the whole sacrificial system both for individuals and for the entire community of Israel.

The one major unfulfilled event commanded in Exodus 25 – 30 is the ordination of the priests. This required the details of the sacrifices and offerings. Now that God has given these instructions to Moses and Israel has constructed the tabernacle with all the accoutrements necessary for what follows, the ordination can proceed.

A. The Ordination of the Priests (8:1 – 36)

1. The Public Presentation of the Priests and the Items (8:1 – 4)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Bring Aaron and his sons, their garments, the anointing oil, the bull for the sin offering, the two rams and the basket containing bread made without yeast, [3]and gather the entire assembly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting." [4]Moses did as the LORD commanded him, and the assembly gathered at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

COMMENTARY

1 The introductory statement, "The LORD said to Moses," ties this text with what has preceded it and links it to the instructions concerning the sacrifices. The same phrase also began the instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus 25:1.

The rest of the chapter follows closely Exodus 29:1 – 37 (cf. J. Milgrom, "The Consecration of the Priests: A Literary Comparison of Leviticus 8 and Exodus 29," in *Ernten was man sät: Festschrift für Klaus Koch zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. E. R. Daniels et al. [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1991], 273 – 86), with a few minor exceptions and variations of sequence. There God describes the ordination procedure to Moses. In Leviticus 8 Moses executes it exactly as God commanded him. The Levitical performance naturally divides into several sections: the public presentation of the priests and the items (vv.2 – 4), the priestly robing and anointing (vv.5 – 13), the purification offering (vv.14 – 17), the burnt offering (vv.18 – 21), the ordination offering (vv.22 – 29), the consecration (vv.30 – 35), and the conclusion (v.36).

2 – 4 These verses list the people and items Moses must present at the Tent of Meeting, where all Israel has assembled. This corresponds to Exodus 29:1 – 3, though there is no mention there of the assembly of the entire congregation. Exodus 28:1 – 5 describe the priestly vestments, vv.5 – 14 outline the ephod, vv.15 – 30 consider the breastplate, and vv.31 – 43 conclude with the description of the remaining priestly garments. Exodus 39:1 – 31 explains the manufacture of these garments. The anointing oil's composition is described in Exodus 30:22 – 33. Together these elements form the essentials for the consecration of the priests. All of them carry a high price in ancient Israel. They form some of the most valuable commodities available. This reflects the importance of giving

one’s best possessions to God (cf. Lk 7:37 – 50).

NOTES

1 – 4 Gorman, 49 – 50, observes how this ritual, performed before the whole community (vv.1 – 4), forms the fifth of five major foundation ceremonies stretching from Genesis 1 to Leviticus 8. Each is divided into seven sections:

• seven acts of speech (on seven days) for the creation of the world (Ge 1:1 – 2:4a)

• seven speeches for the creation of sacred space in the tabernacle (Ex 25 – 31)

• seven acts of Moses in the construction of sacred space (Ex 40:17 – 33)

• seven speeches for the sacrifices in the sacred space (Lev 1 – 7)

• seven acts for the ordination of the priests for the sacred space (Lev 8)

Thus this chapter describes the conclusion and culmination of God’s creation of a means to maintain a relationship with his people.

2 – 35 The differences in detail and sequence between the texts of Exodus 29 and Leviticus 8 (see Hartley, 109) are expected and attested elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern texts that describe the administrative and the procedural (Lev 8 – 9) aspects. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 495 – 97) refers to Wright (*Disposal*), whose work compares Hittite rituals where this difference occurs. See also Milgrom’s discussion of the Old Babylonian period Samsuiluna B inscription (ibid., 549 – 53), in which the gods command the king to build a temple and other structures (prescriptive) and then describes how the king completes the building (descriptive). Some passages are repeated verbatim, while others display a measure of paraphrase and emendation.

Wenham, 137, observes a chiasm in which God commands (A) the priestly anointing actions for Aaron and his clothes (v.2) and (B) the assembling of the people (v.3). Moses obeys by (B) assembling the people (vv.4 – 5) and (A) performing the installation ceremony (vv.6 – 30). For a chiasm related to the verbal forms, cf. G. A. Klingbeil, "The Syntactic Structure of the Ritual of Ordination (Lev 8)," *Bib* 77 (1996): 509 – 19.

2. The Priestly Robing and Anointing (8:5 – 13)

[5]Moses said to the assembly, "This is what the LORD has commanded to be done." [6]Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward and washed them with water. [7]He put the tunic on Aaron, tied the sash around him, clothed him with the robe and put the ephod on him. He also tied the ephod to him by its skillfully woven waistband; so it was fastened on him. [8]He placed the breastpiece on him and put the Urim and Thummim in the breastpiece. [9]Then he placed the turban on Aaron's head and set the gold plate, the sacred diadem, on the front of it, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[10]Then Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and everything in it, and so consecrated them. [11]He sprinkled some of the oil on the altar seven times, anointing the altar and all its utensils and the basin with its stand, to consecrate them. [12]He poured some of the anointing oil on Aaron's head and anointed him to consecrate him. [13]Then he brought Aaron's sons forward, put tunics on them, tied sashes around them and put headbands on them, as the Lord commanded Moses.

COMMENTARY

5 The vestments, with the parallel description in Exodus 29:4 – 9, include the following for the priest: the tunic with its sash, the robe, the ephod with its waistband, the breastpiece with the Urim and Thummim, the turban, the gold plate, and the sacred diadem.

6 – 8 The tunic (Ex 28:39; 39:27) is woven from linen and its sash is

embroidered. Aaron's tunic has a fringe (LXX) or checkered pattern (Rashi and Targums) according to Exodus 28:4, where it is described as *taśbēṣ* (GK 9587; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 502). Aaron's robe (Ex 28:31 – 35; 39:22 – 26) is blue, woven with leather around the neck and with pomegranates of blue, purple, and crimson thread at the hem. Gold bells alternate with the pomegranates along the hem.

Though the ephod lacks a precise description, its composition includes gold with blue, purple, and crimson linen (Ex 28:6 – 14; 39:2 – 7). It joins two linen shoulder pieces, each with an onyx stone engraved with the names of all the sons of Israel, six on each stone. Gold filigree settings and intertwining gold chains that resemble branches anchor the stones in the breastpieces. The waistband is mentioned in Exodus 29:5 as part of the priest's ordination outfit.

The breastpiece or breastplate is the best-known and most colorful part of the ensemble. It is made of a gold plate, doubled over, so that it forms a square of about nine inches on each side (Ex 28:15 – 30; 39:8 – 21). There are four rows, with three precious stones in each row. Beginning with the top row the stones include: ruby, topaz, beryl, turquoise, sapphire, an unidentified stone (*yālhᵉlōm,* GK 3402; NIV, "emerald"; RSV, "diamond"), jacinth, agate, amethyst, chrysolite, onyx, and jasper. Each stone contains the name of one of the twelve tribes, and all are mounted with gold filigree.

Gold "branches" form a border for the breast-piece and extend through gold rings at each of the two upper corners to attach the breastpiece to the shoulders of the ephod. Two additional sets of gold rings, with blue cords running through them, attach the remaining corners of the breastpiece to the ephod's shoulders above its middle band. The breastpiece of the priest shields the ephod and remains fastened tightly to it. It also contains a pocket in order to hold the Urim and Thummim; this positions them near the heart of the priest.

The Urim and Thummim appear five times in the Bible and nowhere else in extrabiblical literature before the Hellenistic period (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8; Dt 33:8; Ezr 2:63; Ne 7:65; Urim occurs by itself in Nu 27:21; 1Sa 28:6). The Deuteronomy passage ascribes the care of the Urim and Thummim to the Levites. The Ezra and Nehemiah passages are duplicates in which Judah's governor informs would-be priests who cannot demonstrate their genealogies

that they must wait until a priest arises who can consult the Urim and Thummim.

The name Urim (*ʾurîm*, GK 242) may relate to the word for light (*ʾur*, GK 241) in the plural, thus designating a gem or other object that could reflect light in different ways. Though Thummim (*tummîm*, GK 9460) has no known etymology in its present vocalization, commentators follow the Talmud (*b.Yoma* 73*b*) and translate it as "perfection" or "faultless" (based on the root *tmm*; GK 9462). The objects seem to function in some manner to determine God's will regarding various questions and issues. Thus, some have viewed the objects as an Israelite form of divination. But the biblical text remains silent on their exact purpose or function. C. Van Dam (*The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997], 217 – 32) suggests that Urim and Thummim refer to a single gem, a "perfect light," and describe a precious stone that confirms that the high priest's words are from God's Spirit by providing a miraculous illumination, but this is by no means certain.

9 The turban is made of linen (Ex 28:39; 39:27). The gold plate must have the engraving "Holy to the LORD" (Ex 28:36 – 38; 39:30 – 31). A blue cord attaches it to the front of the headdress, which positions the plate on Aaron's forehead. This object serves to identify the priest as acceptable for the consecration of the gifts from the Israelites.

The sacred diadem receives only the briefest mention (Ex 29:6; 39:30). It is related to the gold plate, and in Exodus 39:30 they seem to be identical. The turban (Eze 21:31) and diadem (2Sa 1:10) are used elsewhere only of kings and thus depict Aaron's position as one of a ruler in Israel (Fleming, "Biblical Tradition," 409).

The use of precious stones, gold, and fine fabrics for the clothing of the high priest emphasizes the special value of the priest and his unique relationship to God. The tabernacle and temple both have these gems and other valuables. But their concentration in the dress of the priest suggests a significance to his person that transcends anything else in the Holy Place. The priest symbolized Israel in all its holiness approaching the Lord. The precious items reflected this divine presence in fellowship with Israel.

10 – 13 Everything in the tabernacle is anointed with oil, symbolizing the preparation of all the objects for their use in the sacrificial system. The sevenfold anointing of the altar recognizes its special place. Rather than viewing the rite as magical protection against the profane outside the court or some originally separate ritual that was added when the altar became connected with the temple (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 516 – 17), it is best to see here a specific concern for the heart of the sacrificial ceremony and the place where atonement is rendered and consecration is made for the priests.

In addition to the clothes, Moses washes Aaron and his sons and anoints Aaron's head with oil. The former ritual takes place before robing Aaron and further demonstrates the need for purity. The anointing with oil follows after Moses has sprinkled the same oil on the tabernacle — especially the altar, which he sprinkles seven times, and the utensils, the basin, and its base. The anointing oil is prepared with special spices, including myrrh, cinnamon, and cane spice, all of which are mixed with olive oil (Ex 30:22 – 33; 37:29). God restricts it to the sanctuary and the priests; no one else can use this mixture. Keil, 336, observes how anointing with oil symbolizes the presence of God's Spirit (1Sa 10:1, 6; 16:13 – 14; Isa 61:1). Jesus received the Spirit at the beginning of his ministry and gave it to his followers (Lk 3:22; Jn 20:22).

God had instructed Israel to build the altar with acacia wood, make it five feet tall, and use bronze for the horns on its corners as well as for the various utensils, including shovels, bowls, forks, and fire pans (Ex 27:1 – 8; 38:1 – 3). They also used bronze to build the basin and its base (Ex 30:17 – 21; 38:8). Positioned between the altar and the Tent of Meeting, the priests wash their hands and feet before approaching the Tent of Meeting.

The description of Aaron as "anointed priest" has already received attention as possessing the same root as "Messiah." Aaron's anointing as priest, commanded and referred to many times earlier (Ex 28:41; 29:7, 29; 30:30; 40:13; Lev 6:13; 7:36), provides the first example in the Bible of anyone anointed with oil (Hess, "Image of the Messiah"). The same is true of Aaron's sons with their linen garments. Moses anoints them to serve in the ministry of the priesthood also.

The special correlation between the sanctuary and the priest in terms of descriptions of materials and the anointing oil itself suggests that the high priest

embodies the sacred, just like the sanctuary (B. Levine, "The Descriptive Tabernacle Texts of the Pentateuch," *JAOS* 85 [1965]: 311). This understanding anticipates the sense of Christ's body as embodying the church in the NT (Eph 4:1 – 16).

NOTES

7 The ephod has a cognate in Ugaritic (,*ipd*) and Akkadian (*epattu*), where it describes a costly garment that may be associated with the robing of images of deities (Levine, 50; Jdg 8:7).

8 The rabbinic (Masoretic) tradition notes that this is the central verse in the Pentateuch. It may be no accident that this central location describes the central figure in the ongoing reconciliation between God and his people, viz., the high priest.

10 – 12 The act of anointing the high priest has been traditionally understood as a postexilic phenomenon that passed from the anointing of kings after the destruction of Jerusalem and its royal line in 586 BC (see Noth, 38, 69). But the only other installation ritual in which the priest is anointed as part of the installation is found in thirteenth-century BC Emar, a Syrian town whose West Semitic cultural background may be compared to Israel's (see Fleming, "Biblical Tradition," 405; G. A. Klingbeil, *A Comparative Study of the Ritual of Ordination as Found in Leviticus 8 and Emar 369: Ritual Times, Space, Objects and Action* [Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1998]; idem, "The Anointing of Aaron: A Study of Leviticus 8:12 in Its OT and ANE Context," *AUSS* 38 [2000]: 231 – 43).

REFLECTION

As valuable as the priest's garments were, so much more special was the fellowship of God with Israel and is the fellowship of God with his people today (1Pe 1:7). For Christians, the call to be a kingdom of priests (Ex 19:6; 1Pe 2:5) leads to concerns to clothe ourselves with the precious and necessary garments

of faith, love, and the fruit of the Spirit (Col 3:12; 1Th 5:8; Wenham, 140).

3. The Offerings (8:14 – 29)

[14]He then presented the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. [15]Moses slaughtered the bull and took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify the altar. He poured out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it. [16]Moses also took all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys and their fat, and burned it on the altar. [17]But the bull with its hide and its flesh and its offal he burned up outside the camp, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[18]He then presented the ram for the burnt offering, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. [19]Then Moses slaughtered the ram and sprinkled the blood against the altar on all sides. [20]He cut the ram into pieces and burned the head, the pieces and the fat. [21]He washed the inner parts and the legs with water and burned the whole ram on the altar as a burnt offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire, as the LORD commanded Moses.

[22]He then presented the other ram, the ram for the ordination, and Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head. [23]Moses slaughtered the ram and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron's right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [24]Moses also brought Aaron's sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood against the altar on all sides. [25]He took the fat, the fat tail, all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys and their fat and the right thigh. [26]Then from the basket of bread made without yeast, which was before the Lord, he took a cake of bread, and one made with oil, and a wafer; he put these on the fat portions and on the right thigh. [27]He put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and waved them before the Lord as a wave offering. [28]Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering as an ordination offering, a pleasing aroma, an offering made to the Lord by fire. [29]He also took the breast — Moses' share of the ordination

ram — and waved it before the Lord as a wave offering, as the Lord commanded Moses.

COMMENTARY

14 – 29 Moses presents three major offerings before the Lord in accordance with the instructions of Exodus 29:10 – 28: the purification offering, the burnt offering, and the ordination offering. This order differs from that found earlier. As noted, 1:1 – 6:7 presents the offerings in a didactic order by association with similar offerings for the purpose of teaching; 6:8 – 7:38 adopts an administrative order, grouping the offerings according to their recipients.

In Leviticus 8, for the first time, the order of offerings places the purification offering before the burnt offering. Rainey refers to this as a procedural order, i.e., the customary sequence in which the offerings were made when actually performed (9:7 – 14; 14:12, 20; 15:15, 30; Nu 6:16 – 17; 2Ch 29:20 – 36; Eze 43:18 – 27; see Rainey, "The Order of Sacrifices in Old Testament Ritual Texts," *Bib* 51 [1970]: 494 – 98). Theologically, this order demonstrates first the need to deal with sin before coming before God. The burnt offering stresses the total dedication to God that is possible now that sin has been dealt with (Wenham, 142). Finally, the other offerings emphasize the particular concerns or desire for fellowship that follows.

Priestly Offerings

Elements	Purification Offering	Burnt Offering	Ordination Offering
1 Presentation	14 He then presented the bull for the purifirca-tion offering,	18 He then presented the ram for the burnt offering,	22 He then presented the other the ram for the ordination,
2 Laying on	and Aaron and his sons laid their	and Aaron and his sons laid their	and Aaron and his sons laid their

of Hands	hands on its head.	hands on its head.	hands on its head.
3 Slaughtering	15 Moses slaughtered the bull	19 Then Moses slaugh-tered the ram	23 Moses slaughtered the ram
4 Manipulation of Blood	and took some of the blood, and with his finger he put it on all the horns of the altar to purify the altar. He poured the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. So he consecrated it to make atonement for it.	and sprinkled the blood against the altar on all sides.	and took some of its blood and put it on the lobe of Aaron’s right ear, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. 24 Moses also brought Aaron’s sons forward and put some of the blood on the lobes of their right ears, on the thumbs of their right hands and on the big toes of their right feet. Then he sprinkled blood against the altar on all sides.
5 Arrangement of Pieces and Burning of Meat		20 He cut the ram into pieces and burned the head, the pieces and the fat.	
6a Presentation of Fat on Altar	16 Moses also took all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, and both kidneys and their fat,	21 He washed the inner parts and the legs with water	25 He took the fat, the fat tail, all the fat around the inner parts, the covering of the liver, both kidneys and their fat and the right thigh.
6b Presentation			26 Then from the basket of bread made without yeast, which was before the LORD, he took a cake of bread, and one made

of Bread and Wave [=Elevation] Offering			with oil, and a wafer; he put these on the fat portions and on the right thigh. 27 He put all these in the hands of Aaron and his sons and waved them before the LORD as a wave offering.
7 Burning on Altar	and burned it on the altar.	and burned the whole ram on the altar as a burnt offering, a pleas-ing aroma, an offering made to the LORD by fire,	28 Then Moses took them from their hands and burned them on the altar on top of the burnt offering as an ordination offering, a pleasing aroma, and offering made to the LORD by fire.
8 Wave (Elevation) Offering			29 He also took the breast – Moses' share of the ordination ram – and waved it before the LORD as a wave offering,
9a Remaining Materials Burnt Outside	17 But the bull with its hide and its fl esh and its offal he burned up outside the camp,		
9b By Divine Command	as the LORD commanded Moses.	as the LORD commanded Moses.	as the LORD commanded Moses.

Four of the nine elements are identical for each offering: 1, 2, 3, and 9. Number 7 includes a reference to Moses' burning of the animal on the altar in every case. All of these elements constitute the essential parts of an animal sacrifice. It must be presented to the Lord. The priests lay their hands on the animal to signify the choice of the animal and sometimes the transfer of sin and guilt. The animal must be slaughtered for it to substitute in the deserved death of

the person(s) who laid hands on it. They must burn it on the altar to signify its dedication to the Lord. Because the Lord owns the offering, following his directions is essential for the offering's effectiveness.

There are two differences between this purification offering and the others. In the former, the blood purifies the horns and then the whole altar (4:4). Also, the hide and offal are taken outside the camp and burned (4:11 – 12).

The burnt offering adds information about the meat of the ram that Moses cuts into pieces and burns, along with the head and the fat. This occurs with most burnt offerings (except birds, 1:8, 12). The offerer must burn the "whole" of the animal, as in the burnt offering of Leviticus 1 (vv.9 and 13). Thus this description emphasizes the totality of the sacrifice.

The ordination offering adds specifics about the application of the blood to the priests. Keil, 340, and Wenham, 143, suggested that the right ear, right hand, and right foot of each of the priests symbolize their sense of hearing, their capacity to act, and their movement about. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 529; cf. Gorman, 135) argues more persuasively that the blood is applied to the extremities to achieve purification and protection against evil at the outer and most vulnerable areas of the body.

All of these activities constitute the role of the priest. In addition, he dedicates the unleavened bread to the Lord and elevates (rather than the traditional "waves") the right thigh and breast before the Lord. This publicly recognizes that the one who offers these items (the priest) receives them back from God as a gift for his own food. The right side represents the preferred side in the OT (Ge 32:32; 38:17 – 19; Ex 15:6; Lev 7:32; 1Ki 2:19). As elsewhere with the purification offering, the blood and its daubing achieve purification so that the priest may begin his ministry.

In v.27 the grain and meat offerings are placed in the priests' hands, which they raise toward the Lord. Though Moses officiates, only the priests are able to make this offering. The offering is an elevation offering or a wave offering (תְּנוּפָה, GK 9485) that represents the transfer to God of ownership of the thing so offered (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 531).

In summary, the purification offering of the bull purifies the altar and places the priests in a relationship with God unobstructed by sin. The burnt offering establishes the dedication of the priests to their life of ministry before God. The ordination offering of the second ram places the priests in a specially recognized position in which they are alone sprinkled with blood and specific parts of many sacrifices are given to them. office is not dependent on his character but rather on God's choice. The sanctity of the office is not dependent on the holiness of the one who holds the office. A sinful priest is not automatically deposed.

NOTES

14 – 15 Gorman, 86, observes that the blood placed on the horns of the altar purges it of sin, while that poured out at the base of the altar consecrates it to God.

15 The purification offering follows the anointing of the altar in v.11 and its consecration. This sequence is without precedent. In Exodus 29 there is no mention of the anointing of the altar. In Exodus 40 there is no mention of a purification offering. But should not the altar be sanctified before it is dedicated? Milgrom proposes a textual interpolation of vv.10a – 11; however, this is not necessary.

This same sequence becomes true of the priests, especially Aaron. He is consecrated to the holy office in 8:10 – 11 with the same oil used to consecrate the altar. But not until v.15 is atonement made. The recipient of the atonement in v.15 is not specified. If the verb is understood as a third person impersonal form, it could imply that the object is Aaron rather than the altar. Even though Aaron sinned (Ex 32), the oil of consecration is given to him and to the remainder of the priestly and tabernacle ser vice, because Aaron's investiture of

Thus the consecration must necessarily precede the forgiveness, because without the consecration with oil the priest's offering of the purification offering cannot happen. The same is true of the altar. It must be consecrated for its use in the tabernacle before it can function to make atonement, whether for itself or for anyone else. Verse 15 thus describes the inauguration of the altar to its permanent function, to make atonement for it.

4. The Consecration (8:30 – 35)

[30]Then Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood from
the altar and sprinkled them on Aaron and his garments and on his sons and
their garments. So he consecrated Aaron and his garments and his sons and
their garments.
[31]Moses then said to Aaron and his sons, "Cook the meat at the entrance
to the Tent of Meeting and eat it there with the bread from the basket of
ordination offerings, as I commanded, saying, 'Aaron and his sons are to eat
it.' [32]Then burn up the rest of the meat and the bread. [33]Do not leave the
entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your
ordination are completed, for your ordination will last seven days. [34]What
has been done today was commanded by the Lord to make atonement for
you. [35]You must stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting day and night
for seven days and do what the Lord requires, so you will not die; for that is
what I have been commanded."

COMMENTARY

30 With Aaron and his sons thus prepared, the time has arrived for the consecration of these men to the priesthood. Moses takes the oil of anointing, already prepared, and the blood from the sacrifice of the ram of ordination. These are now sprinkled on Aaron and his sons. The blood and oil sanctify these priests. Anointing with both oil and blood in the ordination of a priestly figure is unknown elsewhere except in a thirteenth-century BC Emar ritual anointing of a priestly figure (Fleming, "Biblical Tradition," 410).

31 – 35 Aaron and his sons will cook the remaining meat of the ram of ordination and consume it as a symbol of their acceptance by God and their ability to receive portions of certain offerings that God has set aside for the priests. As noted above, the fellowship offering, purification offering, and guilt offering set aside portions for the priests. The fact that they consume it at the Tent of Meeting (cf. comment on 6:16 – 18) implies both a publicly recognized right and privilege and the fact that the dedicated food has a holiness that cannot

allow its profanation by removing it outside the sacred area. The priests must burn what remains rather than remove it from the area of the altar or allow it to rot.

An additional requirement for the full consecration of the priests is that they remain at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days. Apparently, this serves to recognize that God has established his priesthood at his sanctuary. It separates Aaron and his sons from the remainder of the Israelites. The area around the Tent of Meeting becomes their home. Further, their consecration is confirmed as they remain in this sacred space rather than wander back and forth between the Tent of Meeting and the more profane area of the camp of Israel. To do this invokes the death penalty.

Here for the first time comes the suggestion that the incredible privilege of the priesthood carries with it serious responsibilities. Thus, while the priests receive among the finest of foods available as gifts for their ser vice at the altar of God, they also can incur the wrath of God more quickly and easily as they remain so close to that which is holy. Of course, the mention of death here anticipates and provides a literary link with the death of Aaron's two sons in ch. 10.

NOTES

30 Hartley, 114, suggests that the anointing of the priests and their clothes with oil and blood at the end of the ceremony (contrast Ex 29:21) is a second anointing that climaxes the rite and seals the relationship between the priests and God.

33 It should not be assumed that the sacrifices are repeated each of the seven days (Rooker, 148). Elsewhere, repeated offerings are explicitly delineated in the biblical text (e.g., Nu 28 – 29). The seven-day period marks a time of transition with the completion of the ordination process realized at the end, on the eighth day (G. A. Klingbeil, "Ritual Time in Leviticus 8 with Special Reference to the Seven Day Period in the Old Testament," *ZAW* 109 [1997]: 500 – 13).

The term for ordination (*yᶜmallēʾ ʾet-yedkem*, "your ordination"; lit., "he will fill

your hand") occurs throughout the OT and is an idiom found in Akkadian from the eighteenth century BC on (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 538 – 39). Its origins probably lie outside Israel. Gorman, 128, suggests an etymology related to the taking of the offering or sacrifice in hand by the priest, who thereby recognizes it as legitimate.

REFLECTION

Nowhere does the holiness of God dominate the text more than in the book of Leviticus. Yet this theme remains an important one in the NT. While there is a new sense of liberty and joy in the new covenant Christ has brought through his death on the cross, the presence of God in the community of believers remains a powerful reality and one that cannot be mocked or treated disrespectfully (cf., e.g., Ananias and Sapphira in Ac 5:1 – 6).

5. The Conclusion (8:36)

> [36]So Aaron and his sons did everything the LORD commanded through Moses.

COMMENTARY

36 This conclusion to the ordination ceremony notes the perfect and complete obedience of Aaron and his sons. They do not object to or protest any of the requirements but carefully follow all of them. As a result their initiation into the priesthood bodes well for this system and means by which Israel will continue to enjoy God's presence. As is true throughout Leviticus 1 – 8, Moses remains the sole mediator between God and Israel. With this ordination, however, that will change.

REFLECTION

The anointing of the priest anticipates the high priestly work of Christ in the NT, which is done forever in a heavenly sanctuary (Heb 7:23 – 25; 9:11 – 12). It illuminates the high priestly role of Christians, whose sacrifices include prayer and praise to God (Eph 3:14 – 21; 1Pe 2:9), as well as offering their own bodies (Ro 12:1 – 2).

B. The Beginning of the Priestly Ser vice (9:1 – 24)

OVERVIEW

In ch. 9 further sacrifices are offered. But there are several differences from ch. 8. Moses no longer officiates in the offerings. Aaron, as the main priest, begins his ministry and performs all the sacrifices. Thus the ordination sacrifices of Leviticus 8 and the subsequent weeklong period of waiting at the Tent of Meeting culminate in the public recognition of Aaron and his sons as priests for Israel and its God. On the eighth day Aaron and his sons perform all the major sacrifices for themselves and for the community of Israel. This concludes with Aaron's blessing of the people twice. Thus the priests perform their main priestly tasks in this chapter. This serves to establish their priestly role in the eyes of the people. The divine, miraculous acceptance of their sacrifices at the end of the chapter further confirms their special position.

Like the Emar ritual of the installation of the high priestess (the only other known West Semitic priestly installation ritual), this one takes a full week, with the emphasis being on the beginning and ending ceremonies. Contrary to Wenham, 147; Harrison, 103; and others, ch. 9 takes place as part of the conclusion of the installation rites, not after the conclusion. It forms an integral part of the ordination ceremonies and witnesses to the official transfer of priestly duties to Aaron.

The structure of this chapter develops clearly with instructions to everyone (v.1), to Aaron (v.2), and to Israel (vv.3 – 4). Everyone responds by bringing what Moses requires (vv.5 – 6). Then follows the performance of the instructions by Aaron (v.7), who offers a purification offering (vv.8 – 11) and a burnt offering

(vv.12 – 14) for himself. He next offers a purification offering (v.15), a burnt offering (v.16), and a fellowship offering (vv.18 – 21) for Israel. The sequence — everyone, Aaron, and Israel — pervades most of the chapter. It concludes with the blessings of the people by Aaron and Moses (vv.22 – 23a) and the demonstration of the glory of the Lord in his acceptance of the sacrifices (vv.23b – 24).

1. The Instructions (9:1 – 7)

[1]On the eighth day Moses summoned Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. [2]He said to Aaron, "Take a bull calf for your sin offering and a ram for your burnt offering, both without defect, and present them before the LORD. [3]Then say to the Israelites: 'Take a male goat for a sin offering, a calf and a lamb — both a year old and without defect — for a burnt offering, [4]and an ox and a ram for a fellowship offering to sacrifice before the LORD, together with a grain offering mixed with oil. For today the LORD will appear to you.' "

[5]They took the things Moses commanded to the front of the Tent of Meeting, and the entire assembly came near and stood before the LORD. [6]Then Moses said, "This is what the LORD has commanded you to do, so that the glory of the LORD may appear to you."

[7]Moses said to Aaron, "Come to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and your burnt offering and make atonement for yourself and the people; sacrifirce the offering that is for the people and make atonement for them, as the Lord has commanded."

COMMENTARY

1 The eighth day may be 8 Nisan, in the spring. Along with Aaron and his sons, the elders hear the instructions that can then be communicated to the people.

2 – 4 Moses, who passes on the priestly responsibilities to the ordained priests, gives directions for Aaron, as representative of the line of priests, and for all Israel, the people of God. Aaron shall make offering for himself before he

offers for the people. He must first have his sins forgiven and be made holy in order that he may function as priest for the rest of the people.

5 – 6 Having received Moses' instructions as to the plan of sacrifices for the day, the priests assemble all the people in front of the Tent of Meeting. Thus the whole congregation — not only the representative elders — witness the first offerings of the newly formed priesthood. At the end of this introduction Moses again asserts that what he says carries divine authority. Thus, obedience to these instructions will result in the appearance of the glory of the Lord.

The grammatical construction linking the first and last parts of v.6 (*waw* conjunctive plus imper-fect) often forms a causal or resultative link; that best describes what occurs here. The term "what" (*dābār*, GK 1821) can actually refer to both words and things. Here it emphasizes the power of God's word communicated through Moses to create this means of access to God for Israel. Obedience to these words will bring about God's presence in a new and marvelous way. This principle remains in effect in the NT, in which the word of God gives life and provides the means of living for believers (Mt 4:4; 2Ti 3:16).

7 The final verse of this section provides Moses with the opportunity to address Aaron again. Moses makes clear here that Aaron will act as priest and perform the offerings as the leader of Israel has instructed him. These include a purification offering and a burnt offering both for Aaron and for the people. Finally, Aaron must offer a gift from the people in the form of a fellowship offering. These will serve as a means of atonement for every one of the Israelites.

NOTES

1 "On the eighth day" describes the events of the next two chapters at the end of the seven initial days of preparation. The eighth day in such ceremonies is integrally related to the preceding seven (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 571, for examples such as circumcision [12:2 – 3], the purification of the tabernacle [16:14 – 15, 18 – 19], the duration of the Feast of Tabernacles [23:34 – 36, 39; Nu 29:35], at Ugarit, etc.), but it is also the beginning of something new. Here it is the advent of the public performance of sacrifices.

2, **8 – 11**, **16 – 17** The purification offering concerns general sinfulness rather than a specific sin (Kiuchi, 46; Hartley, 122). The use of a bull calf for Aaron's offering for his sin serves as an ironic contrast to the golden calf of Exodus 32 (Keil, 346 – 47; Wenham, 148, refers this observation to rabbinic tradition).

4 In ancient Near Eastern theophanies the emphasis is on the arrival of the god at the sanctuary as its abode (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 575). In ancient Israel the tabernacle was not God's home but a meeting place with Israel (see comments on ch. 16). The glory of the Lord appears from the tabernacle (see v.24).

REFLECTION

The sequence of offerings in vv. 2 – 4 —purification, burnt, fellowship, and grain — reflects the theological need first to achieve forgiveness, then to consecrate oneself, then to enjoy fellowship with God, and finally to present what one has achieved through personal efforts. For Christians, the need for atonement (Ro 3:23; 6:23) leads to dedication (Ro 12:1 – 2), fellowship (1Jn 1:7), and a life of service (Ro 12:4 – 13). This leads to a full and true worship of God (see Kellogg, 223 – 28; Rooker, 151). Thus the apostolic understanding of Christian discipleship is based on the OT sacrificial system.

2. The Offerings for Aaron the Priest (9:8 – 14)

[8]So Aaron came to the altar and slaughtered the calf as a sin offering for himself. [9]His sons brought the blood to him, and he dipped his finger into the blood and put it on the horns of the altar; the rest of the blood he poured out at the base of the altar. [10]On the altar he burned the fat, the kidneys and the covering of the liver from the sin offering, as the LORD commanded Moses; [11]the flesh and the hide he burned up outside the camp.

[12]Then he slaughtered the burnt offering. His sons handed him the blood, and he sprinkled it against the altar on all sides. [13]They handed him the burnt offering piece by piece, including the head, and he burned them on

the altar. [14]He washed the inner parts and the legs and burned them on top of the burnt offering on the altar.

COMMENTARY

8 – 14 This section has two parts, the purification offering (vv.8 – 11) and the burnt offering (vv.12 – 14). The description of the purification offering parallels the purification offering at the ordination (8:14 – 17). Aaron does everything that Moses did earlier, but with a calf instead of a bull. This is the first time that a calf (*ʿēgel*, GK 6319) is described as a suitable animal for a purification offering. Indeed, previously the word has appeared in the Bible only with reference to the golden calf of Exodus 32. Elsewhere it occurs in the Pentateuch only in Deuteronomy 9:16, 21, again with reference to the idolatrous calf of Exodus 32. Thus it appears that the calf for a purification offering for Aaron corresponds to the golden calf for which Aaron was responsible (Ex 32:1 – 4). The former participation in a foreign cult will now be purged with the sacrifice of a living calf to the living God.

Aaron's offering of the burnt offering also closely matches the account of 8:18 – 21. This time the sacrifices in both texts designate the same animal, a ram. These offerings receive more detail than the corresponding sin and burnt offerings for the people. The text assumes that Aaron performs those sacrifices in the same way as he did these earlier ones. Further, the parallels between Moses' sacrifices in Leviticus 8 and those here provide further demonstration as to how Aaron has taken over from Moses all the responsibilities of the sacrificial cult.

3. The Offerings for the People of Israel (9:15 – 21)

[15]Aaron then brought the offering that was for the people. He took the goat for the people's sin offering and slaughtered it and offered it for a sin offering as he did with the first one.

[16]He brought the burnt offering and offered it in the prescribed way. [17]He also brought the grain offering, took a handful of it and burned it on the altar in addition to the morning's burnt offering.

[18]He slaughtered the ox and the ram as the fellowship offering for the people. His sons handed him the blood, and he sprinkled it against the altar on all sides. [19]But the fat portions of the ox and the ram — the fat tail, the layer of fat, the kidneys and the covering of the liver — [20]these they laid on the breasts, and then Aaron burned the fat on the altar. [21]Aaron waved the breasts and the right thigh before the Lord as a wave offering, as Moses commanded.

COMMENTARY

15 – 17 Again the most common term for the offering is used (*qorban*, GK 7933; cf. 1:2). Moses has already defined each offering (9:2 – 4), and Aaron presents the purification offering, the burnt offering, and the grain offering just as Moses had in ch. 8. In fact, the sin and burnt offerings follow the same procedure as described above when Aaron made these offerings for himself.

Earlier in this chapter Aaron did not make a grain offering for himself, and so no detailed description has yet appeared in this chapter. Hence, unlike the first two offerings for the Israelites, this one includes a full description of Aaron's actions in making the sacrifice of a handful of grain mixed with oil to the Lord on the altar. Leviticus 2:2 details this ceremony and proceeds to allocate the remainder of the grain to the priests. That does not receive mention in 9:15 – 21, perhaps because the focus is on the people, not on the priests or their grain. In 6:9 the law of the burnt offering required the priests to leave the preceding day's burnt offerings burning on the altar until the morning, which guarantees complete consumption of the offering.

The position of the grain offering near the preceding day's burnt offering rather than beside those just offered for Aaron and the people seems odd. Two factors suggest a reason for this. First, the other sin and burnt offerings may still be burning and therefore are not yet completely consumed. Indeed v.24 requires this, as there are no other burnt offerings for the fire of the Lord to consume. If these offerings are still burning, then it is appropriate for the grain offering to be offered somewhere else on the altar so as to avoid mixing the contents and purposes of the offerings. Though this is not forbidden in the laws of the offerings, specific concerns for the purity of ingredients and animals in the

sacrifices require that where possible the offerings be kept separate on the altar.

Second, mention of the burnt offering from the previous day recalls the seven-day period of ordination, in which the priests remained at the Tent of Meeting. Thus this offering is connected with that ordination period and provides a means of gratitude to God for giving Israel priests who will assist in maintaining the relationship between God and his people. In the NT the need for the priesthood is fulfilled in Christ Jesus (Heb 10:10 – 14); therefore, the thanksgiving for the sacrifice of Christ manifests itself in offerings of self-sacrifice (Ro 12:1 – 2; Php 2:17).

18 – 21 Leviticus 3:1 describes the fellowship offering as one in which Israelites may choose any animal "from the herd," though the text goes on to provide examples of only sheep and goats. Here a "cow" (*šôr*, GK 8802) and a ram are used. Note 4:10, which identifies a cow with the bull (*par*, GK 7228) that forms the purification offering for the priest and the people of Israel, though for the latter it is to be a young bull. As noted there, the animal is one of the most valued in ancient Israel, as it was the primary draft animal for plowing and other agricultural tasks. Except for the animals sacrificed, vv.18 – 21 closely parallel the slaughtering, blood manipulation, offering of parts, and burning of the fellowship offering described in Leviticus 2.

The addition in this text is the elevated offering of both the breasts and the thigh. These are presented before the Lord in a manner similar to the ordination offering in Leviticus 8. But there is a difference, though the reason for it is not clear. The fat is placed on the breasts rather than on the thigh.

4. Conclusion: The Priestly Blessing and the Glory of the Lord (9:22 – 24)

> [22]Then Aaron lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them. And having sacrifirced the sin offering, the burnt offering and the fellowship offering, he stepped down.
>
> [23]Moses and Aaron then went into the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. [24]Fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw

it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

COMMENTARY

22 The verb "to bless" (*brk*, GK 1385) occurs 362 times in the OT. It most often appears when God blesses someone (Ge 12:1 – 3). But it also occurs when people bless God (Ge 14:19; 24:27). Less frequent are those times when one person blesses another. Most often this occurs in the patriarchal stories in Genesis. For example, the family of Rebekah blesses her (Ge 24:60); Isaac blesses Jacob (Ge 27:23; 28:1); Jacob blesses Pharaoh (Ge 47:7, 10); and Jacob blesses his offspring (Ge 48:9, 15, 20, 25; 49:28).

Leviticus 9:22 contains the first example in which one person blesses a nation. Aaron raises his hands to do this. He presumably pronounces a blessing, though the reader remains ignorant of what words are used. Perhaps it resembles the priestly blessing cited in Numbers 6:24 – 26. Then comes a second blessing when Aaron and Moses emerge from the Tent of Meeting. The sacrifices have ended, and the pronouncement of blessing may have functioned as a parting word of encouragement.

23 – 24 The glory of the Lord appears as fire comes forth from the presence of the Lord (perhaps from the Most Holy Place) and consumes the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. God's appearance with fire at the time of sacrifice occurred as early as Abram's covenant with God (Ge 15). There "a smoking fire pot with a blazing torch" passed between the sacrificial animal pieces and symbolized God's acceptance of the covenant. Upon the completion of Solomon's prayer of dedication for the temple, the fire of the Lord came from the sky and consumed the burnt offering and other sacrifices (2Ch 7:1). A similar event happened on Mount Carmel in Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal (1Ki 18:38). In each example God confirmed the one leading in the sacrifice and provided a demonstration to the people who witnessed it of divine approval and blessing of the ceremony and its intended significance.

NOTES

22 “He stepped down.” This implies either that there was an ascent (a ramp; cf. Ex 20:26) to the altar (about 4.5 feet high and 7.5 feet square), so that every area of the top could be reached by the priest, or that there was a platform where Aaron stood to bless the people (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 587).

23 The entry of Moses and Aaron into the Tent of Meeting symbolizes the assumption by Aaron of the full priestly perogatives. The goal of worship is to enter the presence of God (Hartley, 124 – 25).

24 “The glory of the LORD appeared,” and “fire came out.” The image of a firecloud that represents the divine presence has been apparent since Exodus 19. For the significance of God’s emergence from the tabernacle, see note on v.4. The fire consumes whatever remains of the sacrifices that have already begun their burning.

REFLECTION

The fire of God takes on a new significance for the Christians who experienced the first Pentecost (Ac 2:1 – 4). Rather than sacrifices and gifts received from the people of God, God sent his Spirit after the completion of Christ’s sacrificial ministry in order to provide gifts for the church to fulfill its mission and ministry in the world (cf. Ps 68:18[19], with Eph 4:7 – 9).

C. Violation of the Sacrifices: The Deaths of the Priest’s Two Sons (10:1 – 20)

OVERVIEW

Warning, 75 – 76, notes that the word אֵשׁ (“fire,” GK 836) occurs seven times in Leviticus 8 – 10 and thus ties together the unit (the word appears in 8:17, 32; 9:11, 24; 10:1 [2x], 2). The final four occurrences include a frame with the phrase, “fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed . . . ” (9:24

and 10:2); between are the two occurrences that describe the "strange fire." The text thus serves as a narrative continuation of the events of the eighth day while indicating a failure on the part of the sons of Aaron. Having been given the greatest privilege as priests of God, they are also expected to take the greatest care in the performance of their duties (Joan E. Cook, "Community, Cult, Sacrament, and Priest-hood: A Response to Karen Eliasen's 'Aaron's War Within: Story and Ritual in Leviticus 10,'" *Proceedings, Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Society* 20 (2000): 101 – 5; see Lk 12:48; 1Co 4:2).

1. The Sin of Nadab and Abihu and Its Consequences (10:1 – 7)

[1]Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu took their censers, put fire in them and
added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before the LORD,
contrary to his command. [2]So fire came out from the presence of the LORD
and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. [3]Moses then said to
Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke of when he said:

" 'Among those who approach me
I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people
I will be honored.' "

Aaron remained silent.

[4]Moses summoned Mishael and Elzaphan, sons of Aaron's uncle Uzziel,
and said to them, "Come here; carry your cousins outside the camp, away
from the front of the sanctuary." [5]So they came and carried them, still in
their tunics, outside the camp, as Moses ordered.

[6]Then Moses said to Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Do not let
your hair become unkempt, and do not tear your clothes, or you will die and
the Lord will be angry with the whole community. But your relatives, all the
house of Israel, may mourn for those the Lord has destroyed by fire. [7]Do
not leave the entrance to the Tent of Meeting or you will die, because the
Lord's anointing oil is on you." So they did as Moses said.

COMMENTARY

1 This text introduces Aaron's two sons "Nadab and Abihu" for the first and only time in Leviticus. They first appeared in Exodus 6:23, at the announcement

of the children of Aaron and Elisheba. In Exodus 24:1, 9 they, along with Aaron, Moses, and the elders, experienced God's presence in a special way at the ratification of the covenant with God. Exodus 28:1 commands their ordination to the priesthood along with the other sons of Aaron. Thus they must have participated in the events of Leviticus 9 and 10.

The key phrase in this verse,"unauthorized fire" (*ʾēš zārâ*), requires study in terms of its usage elsewhere. The same phrase appears only subsequent to this text and always with reference to it (Nu 3:4; 26:61). The root *zwr* (GK 2319) usually carries a meaning related to people outside a family or the nation of Israel or gods other than the Lord (see L. A. Snijders, "זָר/זוּר *zûr/zār*," *TDOT*, 4:52 – 58). The term "strange waters" appears in 2 Kings 19:24 and Jeremiah 18:14; both occurrences refer to waters from foreign lands.

A closer parallel is Exodus 30:9, where the term appears with "incense" as *qᵉṭōret zārâ*: "Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it." The "other incense" contrasts with the holy incense whose recipe in Exodus 30:34 – 38 includes the command, "Do not make any incense with this formula for yourselves; consider it holy to the LORD." The following verse contains the ominous warning, "Whoever makes any like it to enjoy its fragrance must be cut off from his people." Thus the ingredients of the incense used must follow the command of God.

The same is true of the fire. It appeared in 9:24, where it proceeded from the presence of the Lord. Apparently this was the holy fire used in the sacrifices. The unauthorized fire came from some other source. This brought the unholy in touch with the holy things of the sacrifice. The warning that the offender of the incense would "be cut off from his people" should also apply to the offender of the purity of the fire. Both involve the contamination of the holy with what is unholy; either by taking the holy incense and using it for common purposes or by taking common fire and mixing it with the holy fire of God.

To "be cut off from his people"occurs only in the description of the incense (Ex 30:33, 38) and once in Leviticus 23:29 with reference to those who do not afflict themselves on the Day of Atonement. The text goes on in 23:30, "I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day." Thus

God associates the punishment, “to be cut off from his people,” with divine destruction. Insofar as one can relate the offense of Nadab and Abihu to that described in Exodus 30:33, 38, justice demands a similar punishment. Indeed, this first verse directly relates the “unauthorized fire” to the “incense” that they “added” to their fire-pans. Thus there may be an intentional association with the prohibition of “other incense” of Exodus 30:9 and the explicit punishment described in that chapter.

What was the reason for offering such fire? Given the specific instructions regarding the cult in the preceding chapters of Leviticus as well as Exodus, it seems unlikely that ignorance plays a significant role. Nor is a casual and relaxed attitude before God a reasonable explanation. This is especially true in light of the severe warnings for infringement of the Levitical laws as found earlier in the cultic material (Ex 30:38; Lev 7:20). If we assume the account has some background in reality and is not merely a fiction created to teach some priestly point, the question remains as to the reason for such an offense.

Hartley, 130 – 31, suggests that Nadab and Abihu were incorporating non-Israelite religious ceremonies into their priestly work and worship of God. His own hypothesis of a connection with Egyptian religion is given without evidence. Of interest here is a comparison with the ritual from thirteenth-century Emar that describes the installation of Baal’s high priestess (Daniel E. Fleming, *The Installation of Baal’s High Priestess at Emar* [HSS 42. Atlanta: Scholars, 1992]; Hess, “Leviticus 10:1”). On the last day of the seven-day ceremony, the priestess goes forth to the temple as before. But this time, in addition to the customary sacrifices, a torch precedes her (Fleming, *Installation*, 56, line 63).

While there is no direct relationship between this ceremony and the biblical account that should be suggested, it is significant that in the single other lengthy description of a priestly installation ritual in the West Semitic world there is a unique introduction of fire on the final day of the ritual. Was this a customary event in West Semitic rituals, and did the two sons of Aaron seek to introduce it into the ceremony? It is impossible to say, but the comparison does support the theory of the introduction of a non-Israelite custom used in the worship of other deities into the proceedings surrounding the appointment of the priestly figure.

2 Such a violation of the holiness of the altar and the offerings made on it

invites the judgment of God. The Hebrew of the first half of 10:2 parallels the first part of the last verse in ch. 9: “Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed. . . .” This similarity is no accident. Though the implied intentions of the two verses are worlds apart (gracious acceptance vs. angry judgment), the result remains the same: holy fire consumes that which God has chosen as the object of his holiness.

The prophet Ezekiel prophesies with a similar expression of divine judgment in which fire “comes forth” to destroy the sinful nation of Israel (Eze 5:4; 19:14; 28:18).In the NT Jesus prophesies a judgment of fire for everyone (Mk 9:49) but also describes fire in terms of a place of torment for the wicked (Mt 18:8 – 9; 25:41). In the case of Nadab and Abihu, the punishment of fire matches the violation committed with fire (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 599).

3 Moses takes on the role of the interpreter for the deed that has taken place. His words emphasize the holiness and dignity of God and his refusal to allow any infringement on his sacred presence. In the comment, Moses describes God’s holiness “among those who approach me” and “in the sight of all the people.” These groups are not identical. The first group refers to the priests who serve before the Lord. It requires from them a special holiness but also promises to them the presence of God. The second group includes all Israel as a people commanded to honor God. The awesome holiness of God, as described here, explains the terrible consequences of the breach of holiness in the preceding verses and anticipates the commands regarding the holiness of the priests and of the people as found in the following passages.

Aaron’s response of quiet demonstrates that despite earlier failures (cf. Ex 32), he is not ignorant of God’s anger and knows that protests will not only be futile but could lead to further judgment. It is difficult to comprehend how someone could remain quiet, but it speaks volumes for the faith that Israel’s priest has in the ways of God. In experiencing the greatest grief imaginable, Aaron does not protest but awaits direction from God.

4 The need to call other members of Aaron’s family to dispose of the bodies anticipates the prohibition of 21:11, viz., that a priest must not touch a corpse. Mishael is a name that occurs among the three companions in Daniel 1. Someone with a similar name also appears in Nehemiah 8:4 among those of

priestly descent who stand beside Ezra as he reads from the Law. Though an unlikely meaning for an early occurrence of the name, some of its later uses may be understood as “Who is of God/El?” Here, however, the name probably means “Who is Shael?” where Shael is an underworld deity, perhaps here used as an epithet. The name then asks the question, Who is in control of the afterlife? If this interpretation is correct, it forms a special comment on the death of Nadab and Abihu. The Lord God is indeed in control of the lives and deaths of his priests and people.

The name of Mishael’s brother, Elzaphan, means “El/God is Zaphon.” The use of “Zaphon,” the word for the mountain of the north, in a personal name parallels the better-known form “Zephaniah,” “Yahweh is Zaphon.” The association of the deity with the strength and power of a great mountain is not unknown. Indeed, such names occur in the surrounding West Semitic cultures and also appear in Hebrew epigraphy. Both elements, “El/God” and “Zaphon,” occur in other names of the Late Bronze Age West Semitic world (Gröndahl, 94 – 98, 189).

The name of the father of Mishael and Elzaphan, Uzziel, means “El/God is (my) strength.” The elements in this name occur at various times throughout Israel’s history. Because Aaron and Uzziel are related as nephew and uncle, this makes Mishael and Elzaphan direct cousins of Aaron, not of Nadab and Abihu, as the NIV translation implies. A more accurate translation would be “brothers” or “kin,” rather than “cousins.”

Having explained the significance of the incident (v.3), Moses instructs the relatives. These words form the first commands from an authority figure such as Moses. Implicit here is the warning not to act in such holy matters without explicit direction from God or his representative. It is no accident that the narrative of the actions of Nadab and Abihu (v.1) lack any imperative in terms of direction. The first commands in this chapter appear in v.4 and form the remedy for the sacrilege that has already taken place.

5 This verse describes the obedient response of Mishael and Elzaphan. It uses the same two verbs that formed the command of Moses in v.4, “come” (*qrb*, GK 7928) and “carry” (*ns*,a, GK 5951). The phrase “outside the camp” also appears in both the command and the response. The only addition in v.5 occurs in the

note that Mishael and Elzaphan used “their tunics” to carry the two corpses. Though the prohibition of encountering dead bodies did not extend to Israelites other than priests, the commands do affirm that any such encounter rendered the person unclean (Nu 9:6 – 7, 10; 19:11, 16). Thus the precise and obedient response also includes a note that indicates that the two brothers avoided a condition of uncleanness.

6 – 7 These verses contain three prohibitions that Moses directs toward Aaron and his remaining sons, all of whom have been ordained to the priesthood. The first prohibition uses a verb that can describe lack of restraint or discipline (*pr<*, GK 7277; Ex 32:25; Pr 29:18; J. G. Janzen,“The Root *prc* in Judges v 2 and Deuteronomy xxxii 42,” *VT* 39 [1989]: 393 – 406). It occurs here and elsewhere of unkempt hair. This is not a prohibition against long hair in itself; rather, it describes groomed hair, however long it is. On men, longer hair could be drawn back and tied, as reliefs in and around Israel suggest.

Loose hair characterizes the unclean person with diseased skin (13:45), the woman charged with adultery (Nu 5:18), the Nazirite (6:5), and the military enemies of Israel (Dt 32:42). These examples characterize such a person as unclean or barbaric. Only the Nazirite does not fit this; his uncut hair, however, forms a symbol of his continued devotion to his vow. But the category of unclean best applies here. Priests must become the purest of people in Israel in regard to their holy status before God. Leviticus 21:10 reiterates the prohibition against unkempt hair and associates it with the anointing oil on the high priest’s head. The cleanliness and “order” of the hair symbolizes the presence of the holy within the priests. This holiness carries the power of God and authority to accomplish the duties of the priests.

The prohibition against tearing one’s clothes includes a rare verb (*prm*, GK 7268) that occurs only three times and always in connection with unkempt hair — 13:45 commands it for the leper, and 21:10 includes it as part of the high priest’s dress code. Torn clothes may symbolize a condition of disorder and uncleanness that God will not tolerate in his servants; 21:10 also associates the anointing oil with these clothes. It seems that, as in Egypt, the oil applied to the head ran down onto the clothes. The prohibitions of 21:10 address the high priest in particular. But the context of Leviticus 10 applies these prohibitions to all the priests with regard to the specific condition of the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. The priesthood must accept their deaths as part of the experience of the holiness

of God. This takes precedence over any mourning for the loss of relatives.

In the final prohibition (v.7), Moses warns the priests not to leave the Tent of Meeting. Here the command directly precedes the reason, viz., the presence of the anointing oil on the priests. This relates to Leviticus 9 – 10 and the command to spend a week at the Tent of Meeting after the priests were anointed. This verse explains further the impossibility for the priests to follow their dead family members and participate in their burials.

Both v.5 and v.7 end with a similar note regarding the obedience of the people involved according to the words of Moses. Both phrases conclude two short sections (vv.4 – 5 and 6 – 7) with similar structure: Moses commands members of the family of Aaron in regard to their reaction to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu, and their obedience includes a note that the response exactly follows the words of Moses.

Thus the priests demonstrate their willingness to put their ministry to God ahead of everything else, even their natural family love for their brothers and sons. This act legitimizes their role as priests after the sacral violation of Nadab and Abihu called it into question. It effectively recognizes their office, because God does not launch further punishment against them nor does he destroy their family. The priesthood remains in the hands of Aaron and his descendants. Such commitment recalls the stern demands that Jesus gave to any who wished to follow him as disciples (Lk 14:26 – 33).

NOTES

1 J. C. Laughlin (“The ‘Strange Fire’ of Nadab and Abihu,” *JBL* 95 [1976]: 559 – 65) summarizes the history of interpretation. For an analysis of his view and others, see Hess, “Leviticus 10:1.” Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 596) observes that on the basis of the sequence of names in Exodus 24:1, 9 – 11, Nadab and Abihu were ranked in status next to Moses and Aaron.Abihu is a confessional name meaning “He is (my) Father.” In the context of ancient Israel, users would naturally understand it to refer to the Lord. The two elements in the name are common West Semitic and could be used in names at any time in Israel’s history.

“Nadab,” however, has been associated with mainly first-millennium BC names as found in the name of a later king of Israel (1Ki 14:20; 15:25 – 31), in Old South Arabic names, and on a seventh-century BC ostracon from Tel Arad (no. 39, line 3). Otherwise, it occurs as a root of nouns and other forms meaning “free, willing, generous.” The personal name retains a shortened form of the confession, “Yahweh is generous.” The more complete form is found in the name on the Arad inscription. But it is important to note that the root occurs in personal names from second-millennium West Semitic cultures as well. From the early second millennium, compare Amorite names such as *na-du-bu-um*, *na-du-be-lí*, and the feminine name, *na-du-ba* (Gelb et al., 332). From thirteenth-century Ugarit the root appears in the personal name *ndbn* and *ndbd* (Gröndahl, 164).

Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 628 – 33) argues that the polemical purpose of the story was to discourage the unauthorized burning of incense by Israelites during the monarchy. If two priests could be so judged for offering legitimate incense in a legitimate sanctuary with strange fire, how much more any non-priestly Israelites who might offer unauthorized incense in an unauthorized place with strange fire. But one must ask why, if prohibition of lay incense offerings outside the temple is the concern, the story does not describe just such an offering, instead of strange fire alone?

3 The silence of Aaron has been attributed either to his grief at the sudden deaths of his sons, to the solace of Moses’ words, or to his awe at God’s holiness (Hartley, 134). In addition, it may refer to Aaron’s awareness that complaint would be futile and lead only to further judgment. Verse 19 suggests that Aaron’s focus is on the death of his sons and what will please God in the light of this. Whether this silence is a bitter biting of his tongue or a humble acquiescence is not clear from the context. Levine (“Silence, Sound, and the Phenomenology of Mourning in Biblical Israel,” *JANESCU* 22 [1993]: 75 – 115) identifies a homonymous root meaning “to mourn” and suggests that Aaron initiates this but is forbidden to carry it further. But the more common root is preferred, as it makes sense in the context.

4 The common suggestion to interpret Mishael as “Who is like God/El?” is difficult to accept because: (1) there is little or no evidence for relatives (*ša*)m in West Semitic personal names, and (2) the relative would more accurately translate as “of, from,” not “like.” The divine name “Shael” also occurs in

“Methushael,” the name of a descendant of Cain in Genesis 4:18. “Shael” contains the same consonants as the Hebrew word for the underworld, *sheol*. The difference in vocalization may reflect a separate vocalic development that occurred before the present pronunciation of biblical Hebrew (Hess, *Studies*, 43 – 45).

For the association of a mountain with a name, see Hess, *Studies*, 92 – 94, and the example of Haran. Though some have attempted to relate “Zaphon” to a deity (H. Niehr, “Zaphon,” *DDD*, 927 – 29), this depends largely on how one reads the metaphorical nature of the Ugaritic mythological text. Even there it may be an image of the deity, perhaps Baal. Of course, similar metaphors exist in the Bible (Ps 114:4, 6).

6 The names “Eleazar” and “Ithamar” both contain West Semitic forms and elements that occur in second-millennium BC West Semitic personal names from Mari (Middle Bronze Age) and Ugarit (Late Bronze Age). Eleazar means “El/God has helped/is a help.” For the first part of the name, see the discussion of Elzaphan. For the second part, see Gröndahl, 113; Gelb et al., 13, 259 – 60. The most likely etymology of “Ithamar,” though not without difficulty regarding the initial vowel, is that of a Gt infixed verbal form from the root *ʾmr* (GK 606) — in Hebrew “to say,” but in Ugaritic and Akkadian,“to see.” Propp (“Ithamar,” *ABD*, 3:579 – 81) cites Mari and Ugaritic names with similar forms. He analyzes it as “he appeared.” Thus it would be a confessional name shortened by omission of the deity who appeared. Within Israel this would naturally be interpreted as “(the LORD) appeared.”

Levine, 60, argues that loose hair and torn clothes could symbolize mourning for these family members. But Budd, 152, notes that loose hair is not associated with mourning.

REFLECTION

It is difficult to read this passage without comparing it to the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1 – 11. In both incidents an offering is presented that is unacceptable to God, whether because of its contamination with unauthorized fire or the lying of the offerer concerning the degree of sacrifice involved in

making the offering. In both cases there is a presumption that the guilt involved is not accidental but intentional. Both events lead to the deaths of the guilty parties and both see them carried from the place of their offering by other members of the congregation. Both events result in a new emphasis on the holiness of God and his refusal to tolerate evil.

In both cases, however, this sin seemed to be no greater than subsequent violations of the holiness of God. For example, Nadab and Abihu seem no worse than the sons of Eli in 1 Samuel 2:12 – 17 and other corrupt members of the priesthood throughout Israel's history. The same is true of members of the early church, where cheating and lying were not unknown. Why then do Aaron's sons and Ananias and Sapphira suffer such extreme punishment? The common theme for both is that their violation is the first. Whether with the first couple in the garden of Genesis 3, or the golden calf of Exodus 32, or Nadab and Abihu, or the husband and wife of Acts 5 — in each case the sin forms the first violation of a special holy relationship or community God has established. It seems that such sins have a particular repugnancy with God. Not only do the punishments serve to warn others by their severity, but they also demonstrate the breakdown of a purity whose restoration is always difficult and whose scars never fully heal. Such is the wages of sin (Ro 3:23).

However, the glorification of God through the death of those who are intimate with him is recorded in the OT only here. This glorification has a counterpart in the glorification of God's name at Jesus' request in John 12:28, a glorification that looks ahead to the death of Jesus as well as the immortal life beyond death. If this is applied to Nadab and Abihu, then the result for the sons of Aaron may have been positive and expressed their relationship with God beyond death. (Milgrom [*Leviticus 1 – 16,* 603 – 4] cites both the NT and Philo.)

2. Instructions for the Priests (10:8 – 11)

> [8]Then the LORD said to Aaron, [9]"You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. [10]You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, [11]and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD

has given them through Moses."

COMMENTARY

8 These four verses introduce the first set of regulations regarding the priesthood. Unlike the earlier instructions, these do not have Moses as a mediator; instead, God speaks directly to Aaron. This suggests a new recognition of the stature of the priesthood. It no longer depends on Moses but has now achieved a direct relationship with God. Thus it can fulfill its purpose of playing a mediatorial role between God and his people.

9 The prohibition of wine and strong drink has a broader application than the earlier commands. There is no explicit application to the needs of the moment. This command prevents unseemly drunkenness at the altar. The expression "wine or other fermented drinks" (*yayin wᵉšēkār*, GK 3516, 8911), occurs seven times in the Bible. Abstinence from it describes the Nazirite in general (Nu 6:3) as well as Samson and his mother during her pregnancy (Jdg 13:4, 7, 14). Hannah denies partaking of it when Eli challenges her (1Sa 1:15). In Deuteronomy 29:6 it describes the wilderness generation that subsisted on the food that God gave. Thus the phrase always describes sobriety in the presence of God, whether in the dedication of a Nazirite, in praying, or in God's guidance of an entire generation. The avoidance of fermented beverages allows the priests to devote full attention, mind and body, to the service of God. In the same way the apostle Paul counsels Christian to avoid drunkenness and contrasts it with the filling of the Holy Spirit of God (Eph 5:18).

10 God exhorts the priests to take the lead in recognizing what constitutes "holy and clean" items on the one hand, and what remains "profane" or "unclean" on the other. The chapters that follow will detail this, and the text here anticipates that discussion. Ezekiel remembers this verse when he indicts Israel's priests for failing to make these distinctions and anticipates a future restoration when the priests will know and teach these matters (Eze 22:26; 42:20). The prophet directly relates the knowledge of this to the law and obedience to it.

11 The knowledge of what God has allowed and forbidden is the responsibility of the priest, and it is to be a primary subject of what he teaches

the people. This gives him authority to interpret, explain, and apply the law to new situations and to each generation of Israel. But it also places on the shoulders of the priests the responsibility for the people's knowledge of and obedience to God's commandments. Their privilege becomes a serious task. The roles of distinguishing right from wrong and of teaching believers continues into the NT with ministers of the gospel, who also have specific and more stringent codes of conduct (1Ti 3:1 – 7; Tit 1:5 – 9).

The fact that the Lord has spoken, whether to Aaron or to all Israel through the priests, frames the beginning and end of this section. This explains the nature of the commands in vv.9 – 11. The sobriety of the priests becomes necessary for proper reception and execution of the divine instruction. The command to teach the people of Israel requires an understanding of what is important and what is not. The command to observe what is holy and what is profane lies at the heart of this section. Not only does this anticipate the following chapters, but it also provides the key for the story of vv.1 – 7, in which Nadab and Abihu fail to make the proper distinction and in which those distinctions become important in the removal of their bodies. It also anticipates the remainder of the chapter. The eating and disposal of the offerings become important symbols for the appropriate treatment of that which is holy.

NOTE

9 "Intoxicating drink" (*šēkār*, GK 8911) can refer to any alcoholic beverage in Hebrew, though the Akkadian cognate *šikaru* most often denotes beer.

3. The Priests Complete Their Consecration (10:12 – 20)

[12]Moses said to Aaron and his remaining sons, Eleazar and Ithamar, "Take the grain offering left over from the offerings made to the LORD by fire and eat it prepared without yeast beside the altar, for it is most holy. [13]Eat it in a holy place, because it is your share and your sons' share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire; for so I have been commanded. [14]But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place;

they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites' fellowship offerings. [15]The thigh that was presented and the breast that was waved must be brought with the fat portions of the offerings made by fire, to be waved before the LORD as a wave offering. This will be the regular share for you and your children, as the LORD has commanded."

[16]When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, [17]"Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD. [18]Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded."

[19]Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the Lord, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the Lord have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" [20]When Moses heard this, he was satisfired.

COMMENTARY

12 Moses instructs Aaron and his two remaining sons concerning the grain offering. This offering was part of those offered at the end of the offerings of consecration and dedication of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood (9:17). The actions described in Leviticus 10 may have all occurred on the same day, the eighth day after the consecration.

The note about the two remaining sons associates the incidents of 10:1 – 7 with what follows (also v.19) and uses the same word to describe what remained of the grain offering after a handful had been burnt in the fire of Leviticus 9. The command to eat beside the altar continues the theme of 10:7, which forbids the priests to depart from the altar and requires that all food consecrated to the Lord be eaten or destroyed on the sanctuary grounds.

13 The repetition of the command to eat the grain offering in the area of the sanctuary repeats the last part of v.12 and continues the theme of the holiness of the bread. The second part of this verse explains why the priests should eat it and why they should eat it in the sanctuary. The priests eat it because it belongs to

them by order of the decree of the Lord (2:3, 10). They eat it in a holy place because it is one of the offerings made to the Lord by fire. Thus they have dedicated and consecrated the grain, and it cannot leave the sanctuary or lie in a place and rot.

14 – 15 The elevation offerings of the breast and thigh come from the ox and ram that became the fellowship offerings for the people. In 7:28 – 34 God commanded that every fellowship offering from an Israelite should include an elevation offering of the animal's breast and thigh and that these should then belong to the priest. In this case the elevation offerings form part of the ceremony involved in the creation and ordination of the priests. Thus it becomes important that the fellowship offering of the people be respected and the priests consume it. It can be eaten anywhere, as was true of fellowship offerings in general, but it is probably eaten by the priests at the sanctuary.

These verses repeat and emphasize the importance of the elevation offering of the thigh and breast as belonging to the priests, both in the present sacrifice and for all future offerings. The emphasis on this perpetual statute reinstates the priests following the deaths of Nadab and Abihu. Aaron and his sons are not diminished in terms of their roles. They continue to receive the offerings of the people and remain worthy of their respect. In the NT as well, those who minister the gospel of Jesus Christ should enjoy the respect of their fellow Christians (1Ti 4:12).

16 – 18 The goat of the purification offering refers to 9:3, 15, where the male goat and a calf formed the purification offering for the people of Israel. This further ties the events of ch. 10 with those on the eighth day of the ordination (9:1; Harrison, 118). Leviticus 6:24 – 30 describes how the priests should eat the remaining meat portions of the offering in the sanctuary precincts. But if the offering includes blood that the priests take into the Most Holy Place, the priests should not eat the offering.

In particular, v.17 emphasizes the importance of the priests' partaking of the food from the purification offering. For the first time in Leviticus this action by the priests appears to have some sort of significance in terms of forgiveness: "It was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD." This describes the involvement of the priest in the

“bearing of iniquity.” At 5:1 it was noted that the phrase sometimes refers to God’s forgiving the sins of others by taking the guilt on himself (Pss 32:5; 85:2[3]; Hos 14:2[3]; Mic 7:18). Here the priests appear to have the opportunity to do this very thing on behalf of the people of Israel.

But an accurate interpretation of this text suggests that the elevation offering itself accomplishes the ministry of atonement. This maintains consistency with the rest of the offerings and the teaching that atonement requires the death of a living creature. The same principle forms the foundation of Christian atonement: without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins (Heb 9:22). Moses’ anger at the priests seems appropriate in that they should eat the leftovers from the offering as a demonstration of their involvement in the offering and their obedience to all the details (6:19). Further, disobedience in cultic matters brings severe punishment (10:1 – 2).

19 – 20 Aaron’s response to the challenge of atonement strikes a remarkable note in the middle of what has been an orderly hierarchy. God speaks to Moses, who addresses everyone else with divine authority. Sometimes God seems to have addressed Aaron and the priests directly, but this never challenges Moses’ authority. Here Aaron does just that. The response indicates that the priestly participation in the eating of the purification offering presumes purity on the part of the priestly line — holiness and obedience in life and attitude. Yet Aaron’s line has just experienced a violation of the covenant and a terrible, divine judgment that can only result in an attitude of confusion, if not anger, on the part of the remaining priests.

In any case, this is not the day for a public display of the purity of the priesthood and its solidarity with God, as would be seen in the eating of the elevation offering. Aaron’s words of protest, “Would the LORD have been pleased,” translates the same Hebrew as Moses’ response, “he was satisfied.” The similar language provides an intentional comparison, viz., that the dissatisfaction of God has been averted and this is what led to Moses’ contentment at the result. In the end, therefore, the goals of Aaron and Moses are identical. They both want to do what pleases God. The example of leadership seeking to please God through obedience to him remains a powerful example and a means of instruction for Christians as much as for Israel (1Th 4:1).

NOTES

14 – 15 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 621) observes that the order of thigh and breast is unusual and that there is no apparent reason why the thigh alone should be raised, since both thigh and breast in the fellowship offering are elevated before the Lord.

16 – 20 The occasion of Moses' anger at the failure of Aaron's sons to eat the purification offering (Aaron himself not being directly accused, perhaps out of deference to his position [Rashi]) should be understood as a failure of the priests to understand that the Israelite purification offering, unlike that of neighboring cultures, has no magical forces of evil left in the meat that can harm them. The priests symbolize holiness and life. The purification offering symbolizes impurity and death. In eating the offering, the priests teach that God's holy life conquers death (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 622 – 25, 635 – 40).

REFLECTION

Only the priest's and the whole community's purification offerings are not eaten. But this is not because their black magic is too powerful; rather, in these cases the priests share in the guilt and the symbolic system will not work for them to consume the offering for their own sin. This is why Aaron and his sons do not eat the meat. They fear that their own responsibility for the sins of Nadab and Abihu produces guilt in them. How much better is the purification offering of Jesus Christ, of which he invites all believers to partake (Mt 26:26; Mk 14:22; Lk 22:19; 1Co 11:24). It symbolizes how the high priest, Christ, gives divine life to his disciples.

III. LAWS OF CLEANNESS AND UNCLEANNESS (11:1 – 15:33)

A. Food (11:1 – 47)

OVERVIEW

Unclean food is forbidden fare for the Israelites. Leviticus divides the animal world into three kinds: unclean animals that cannot be eaten; clean animals that can be eaten; clean animals that can be eaten and also serve as animals for sacrifice. Chapter 11 discusses the first two categories. The last was reviewed in chs. 1 – 9. For background on the distinctions made here, see the contribution of Douglas as summarized in the Introduction,"Scholarship and Interpretation."

The structure of Leviticus 11 focuses on unclean animals more than on clean ones. It begins with land animals, i.e., those animals closest to the Israelites (vv.1 – 7). It proceeds to discuss water animals (vv.9 – 12) and birds (vv.13 – 23). It then returns to land animals and further details unclean ones (vv.26 – 30, 41 – 45). But the major thrust of the second half of the chapter concerns how the uncleanness of the carcasses of both unclean (vv.24 – 25, 31 – 38) and clean animals (vv.39 – 40) affects what and who touches them. A conclusion recapitulates the concerns of cleanness in dealing with animals and associates it with God's holiness (vv.44 – 47).

The identification of many of these animals remains uncertain. Though often one can guess roughly what the name intends, students of the ancient world have no contemporary detailed zoological classification available to them. Thus they can only guess on the basis of the animals known to exist at that time by comparing the words with cognate terms, extant brief descriptions, and later usage of these terms in Hebrew.

For the Christian, the value of this chapter has often served a negative purpose. It contrasts with the insistence by Jesus in the NT that God has declared all foods clean (Mk 7:19; cf. Ac 10). But if these distinctions form part of Israel's ancient covenant because they describe value for animal life and well-being and because they relate their slaughter solely to sacrifice, do these values remain to this day for followers of Jesus Christ? The role of sacrifice has changed, and in modern cultures animals do not serve in this capacity. Nevertheless, nowhere has the value placed on animals — their lives, well-being, and fruitfulness — been abrogated. This priority, originating in the order and mandates of creation (Ge 1 – 11), remains in effect as long as the created world continues and the disciples of Christ seek to obey and worship their Creator.

1. Introduction (11:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, 2"Say to the Israelites:

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a This brief introduction itself begins with the line: "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron." These six words in Hebrew occur here for the first time in Leviticus. Altogether they appear eleven times in the Bible, but only in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. In Leviticus they only occur in chs. 11 – 15 (11:1; 13:1; 14:33; 15:1). Thus they mark off this section from the rest of Leviticus and serve to introduce the major subsections. The phrase occurs only once before, in Exodus 6:13, where it describes the introductory charge to Moses and Aaron to persuade Pharaoh to release Israel from Egyptian bondage.

"Say to the Israelites" is also common, occurring some fourteen times in Leviticus (1:2; 4:2; 7:23, 29; 11:2; 12:2; 15:2; 18:2; 23:2, 10, 24, 34; 25:2; 27:2). Usually, as here, it appears after an initial statement of address.

2. Land Animals, Part I: Quadrupeds (11:2b – 8)

[2]“Say to the Israelites: ‘Of all the animals that live on land, these are the ones you may eat: [3]You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud.

[4]“ ‘There are some that only chew the cud or only have a split hoof, but you must not eat them. The camel, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is ceremonially unclean for you. [5]The coney, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. [6]The rabbit, though it chews the cud, does not have a split hoof; it is unclean for you. [7]And the pig, though it has a split hoof completely divided, does not chew the cud; it is unclean for you. [8]You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you.

COMMENTARY

2b – 4a The first and last words of v.2b in the NIV, “Of all . . . you may eat,” translate two words in the Hebrew text (*tō'kᵉlû mikkōl*, GK 430, 3972). The phrase occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible. Three of those are in Leviticus 11 and refer respectively to land animals (v.2), sea animals (v.9), and winged animals (v.21). An occurrence in Deuteronomy 14:9 parallels Leviticus 11:9. The fifth occurrence is the best known. It is in Genesis 3:1, where the serpent challenges the woman by contradicting God’s words, “You must not eat from any tree of the garden.” What God actually said (Ge 2:16) also contains these same two Hebrew words, but they are separated and not in sequence.

The point is that the commands regarding clean and unclean food recall the garden of Eden and God’s prohibition there of what people could eat. This phrase specifically recalls God’s generosity to people, whether in giving them all the fruit of the garden or in giving them all the animals for food. But everywhere this phrase appears there also follows a restriction, whether of a single tree or various types of animals. In addition, the Israelites hearing this would understand that adherence to it reaches the same level of importance as that found in the command of Genesis 2.

As in Genesis 2:16 – 17, the same pattern of logic occurs here with the presentation of animals. First God states the general point that Israel may eat all land animals. Then he qualifies this statement with specific exclusions. What

Israel may not eat appears at first as a general category: God prohibits Israel from eating all animals that do not both have hooves and chew their cud. Verse 4a makes it clear that Israel may only eat animals that have both characteristics. One is not enough. Hooves may relate to locomotion and thus explain that characteristic. The requirement that they chew their cud seems strange, but it may have an origin in a belief that the food is entirely masticated so that it becomes part of the animal. Further, the one animal that has hooves but does not chew its cud is the pig, which requires a special prohibition.

4b – 8 There follows a list of specific examples of animals that conform to one of the criteria but not to the other. They are therefore unclean and are not to be eaten. Some of the ramifications of the term "unclean" (*ṭāmēʾ*, GK 3238) have already been discussed. Its most important feature is that the animal should not be consumed by an Israelite in covenant with God. The term does not suggest that something about the animal is horrible or defective. In fact, as noted above, it aids in preserving the animal by prohibiting its butchering for food and, as v.8 indicates, by forbidding any use of the carcass for clothing or other purposes for which animals today are bred and killed.

Three animals chew their cud but do not have hooves: the camel, the rock badger, and the rabbit. Actually, the latter two only appear to chew their cud; but appearance, rather than biological precision, is key in these chapters. One animal has split hooves but does not chew its cud — the pig. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 648) notes that these unclean animals cannot be eaten nor can their carcasses be touched. The carcasses of the remaining unclean animal groups in this chapter may be touched, but the animals may not serve as food.

NOTES

3 Though not the solution chosen here, see Harrison, 121 – 29, for the most comprehensive set of medical arguments regarding the distinctions between clean and unclean animals.

Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 646) challenges the traditional rendering of *mapreset parsâ* as "cloven hoof." He notes that horses and other animals are so described (Isa 5:28; Jer 47:3; Eze 26:11; 32:13) though they do not possess

cloven hooves. This expression may be translated, “that grows a hoof.”The term for “cloven hooves” — *uᶜšōsaᶜ šesaᶜ* appears in v.7, where it identifies the pig.

5 The “coney” or “badger” (*šāpān*) occurs only twice outside the lists of unclean animals in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. In Ps 104:18 and Proverbs 30:26 these animals inhabit mountainous and rocky regions. The name may occur in Proto-Sinaitic and South Arabian inscriptions, suggesting a desert habitat. See Holladay, 381.

6 The word for “rabbit” (*ʾarnebet*) occurs nowhere in the Bible apart from these lists. But its occurrences in thirteenth-century BC Akkadian texts from Ugarit and elsewhere (Akkad. *arnabu*), as well as numerous cognates in later Semitic languages, confirm the identification. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 647) regards this word as a general term for various types of hares, which he distinguishes from the common rabbit.

7 The “pig” is an unclean animal because of its many ancient Near Eastern associations with the worship of chthonic deities (Isa 65:4; 66:3, 17). In particular, various Hittite rites and ancient Greek ceremonies involve sacrifices of pigs to gods and goddesses of the underworld. This is true despite the fact that the Hittites regarded the pig as unclean, as was the case in other cultures of the ancient Near East. The Philistines, whose cultural heritage was closely related to that of the Greeks, used pigs for food and perhaps for religious purposes. This is attested at sites such as Ashkelon, Tel Miqne (Ekron), and Timnah. Pig bones and images have been found in pre-Israelite locations in Palestine; however, they are absent in the traditional regions where Israel settled (Dever, 113). This, as well as the settled context in which pigs are raised (see above), attests to the alien nature of the pig in early Israel (see Harry Hoffner, “Second Millennium Antecedents”; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 649 – 53; Larry Stager, “When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon,” *BAR* 17, no. 2 [1991]: 31).

3. Water Animals (11:9 – 12)

> [9]“ ‘Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales. [10]But all creatures in the seas or streams that do not have fins and scales — whether among all the swarming

things or among all the other living creatures in the water — you are to detest. [11]And since you are to detest them, you must not eat their meat and you must detest their carcasses. [12]Anything living in the water that does not have fins and scales is to be detestable to you.

COMMENTARY

9 This text begins with a similar offer as that in v.2. Again there follow restrictions in terms of a general condition ("that do not have fins and scales"), but no specific examples follow. In this case the single condition either applies or doesn't. This is different from the land animals, for which the two conditions required examples to make that point clear. The terms "fins and scales" (*śʿnapîr wʿqaśqeśet*) occurs only in the lists of unclean animals, with two exceptions — both for "scales." This term appears in 1 Sam uel 17:5 and Ezekiel 29:4. The reference in 1 Sam uel is useful, for it describes a coat of armor with scales.

Fins and scales indicate how the animal moves about in the water. They provide the locomotion for movement only in the waters and therefore fulfill the requirement that clean animals move around and remain in one sphere (water, land, or sky).

10 – 12 Following the pattern with land animals, God forbids Israel to eat those that do not meet the condition. He also prohibits touching or using the carcasses of these animals. But the term used to describe these animals is not "unclean." Instead, as the NIV translates, three times the phrase "you are to detest" or something similar appears. In fact, the Hebrew literally rendered reads, "They shall be *šeqes*. [GK 9211] to you." This noun occurs in fourteen verses of the Bible, nine of which are in Leviticus 11, with another two appearing elsewhere in the book (7:21; 20:25). (In Dt 7:26; Isa 66:17; Eze 8:10 *šeqes*. refers to items, whether animals or objects, that are forbidden [M. Douglas, "Sacred Contagion," in *Reading Leviticus*: *A Conversation with Mary Douglas*, ed. J. F. A. Sawyer (JSOTSup 227; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 105]). When brought into a house or the sanctuary, they violate the will and sanctity of God. God nowhere condemns the animal or object; rather, he objects to any contact with it.

4. Birds and Winged Insects (11:13 – 25)

OVERVIEW

This section provides the longest list of animals that Israel must not eat. This is because no explicit criteria exist for distinguishing them. The same word describes these animals as it did the water creatures God prohibited Israel from eating (*šeqes*. , GK 9211). The section begins with a list of birds that the Israelites must not eat (vv.13 – 19). These birds all eat carrion, a characteristic that may be the source of their uncleanness. A second section considers flying insects, against which there is a general ban, though some may be eaten (vv.20 – 23). Finally, there is a general statement about the dangers incurred in touching these animals and their carcasses (vv.24 – 25).

> [13]“ ‘These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, [14]the red kite, any kind of black kite, [15]any kind of raven, [16]the horned owl, the screech owl, the gull, any kind of hawk, [17]the little owl, the cormorant, the great owl, [18]the white owl, the desert owl, the osprey, [19]the stork, any kind of heron, the hoopoe and the bat.
>
> [20]“ ‘All fl ying insects that walk on all fours are to be detestable to you. [21]There are, however, some winged creatures that walk on all fours that you may eat: those that have jointed legs for hopping on the ground. [22]Of these you may eat any kind of locust, katydid, cricket or grasshopper. [23]But all other winged creatures that have four legs you are to detest.
>
> [24]“ ‘You will make yourselves unclean by these; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. [25]Whoever picks up one of their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.

COMMENTARY

13 – 19 The following chart represents a list of the birds that Israel must avoid, following the translation of the NIV with the Hebrew transliteration immediately after and with any likely alternative readings following that.

13	eagle	*nešer*	
	vulture	*peres*	meaning uncertain; derived from root meaning "to break"; perhaps breaks the bones of its victims
	black vulture	*ʿozniyyâ*	also sea eagle, osprey, or bearded vulture
14	red kite	*dāʾâ*	bird of prey; in Ugaritic *dʾy* occurs in parallel with *nšr* (C. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook: Indices, Glossary* [AnOr 38; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965], 383 no. 634)
	any black kite	*ʾayyâ* (onomatopoetic)	or falcon
15	any raven	*ʿōrēb* ("black one")	
16	horned owl	*bat hayyaʿănâ* ("daughter of the desert")	traditionally, ostrich; an owl that lives in ruins and deserts (Isa 13:21; 34:13; 43:20; etc.)
	screech owl	*taḥmās*	or barn owl or kestrel
	long-eared owl	*šāḥap*	not gulls as in NIV, because sea birds appear together below; see J. Aharoni, "On Some Animals Mentioned in the Bible," *Osiris* 5 (1938): 461–78; also long-eared owl (Driver, "Birds")
	any hawk	*nēṣ*	falcon; also occurs in Ugaritic
17	little owl	*kôs*	tawny owl (Driver, "Birds")
	cormorant	*šālāk* (related to "dart"?)	or pelican
	great owl	*yanšûp* (related to "blow" or "twilight"?)	ibis; Akkadian *enšūbu*
18	white owl	*tinšemet* (related to "snort"?)	homonym appears as a lizard in v.30
	desert owl	*qāʾāt* (onomatopoetic)	or horned owl or scops owl
	osprey	*rāḥām*	vulture; so also Deir Alla inscription I line 10 in the masculine plural
19	stork	*ḥăsîdâ* (GK 2884; related to word for "love, covenantal loyalty" due to stork's care for its young)	alternatively, heron; migratory, strong and builder of tree nests (Jer 8:7; Zec 5:9; Ps 104:17)
	any heron	*ʾănāpâ*	Akkadian *eššebu* as a nocturnal bird of ill portent (*CAD E*, 370–71); cormorant (Driver, "Birds")
	hoopoe	*dûkîpat* (onomatopoetic)	feeds on dunghills
	bat	*ʿăṭallēp*	

20 – 23 Of winged insects, all that walk on all four legs are unclean. As before, exceptions to this rule appear. In this case it is those with jointed legs that allow them to hop. The joint resembles the jointed legs of other clean land animals that can walk on the earth in a manner of locomotion appropriate for the sphere in which they live.

The text lists four of these jointed insects: the locust, katydid, cricket, and grasshopper. The first term is the common word for a migratory, fully developed locust (cf. Joel 1:4). The second and third terms are unique to this passage. The fourth term is found in four other texts, but little further can be determined about its nature (Nu 13:33; 2Ch 7:13; Isa 40:22; Ecc 12:5 [the last may be a homonym]). All of these unusual terms suggest that a wide variety of locusts were available for Israel's diet and bring to mind the desert diet of John the Baptist (Mt 3:4; Mk 1:6).

24 – 25 This reference to uncleanness (*ṭāmēʾ*, GK 3238) for the first time designates some winged creatures as such — and not merely as "detestable" (*šeqes*., GK 9211), as the previous verses indicate. Indeed, these two verses form a summary not merely of the winged creatures but also of all creatures described thus far. The introduction of a new stem for this verb (see Notes) argues *against* any attempt to slip in an editorial gloss and *for* a dramatic literary conclusion by the original author that all "unclean" and "detestable" animals render "unclean" the one who touches their carcasses. The use of translations such as "unclean" and "detestable" conveys an emotional content of disgust that does not occur in the original text. Instead, the point remains that touching the carcasses of these animals renders one unfit to remain in the holy community until a certain amount of time has passed ("till eve-ning") and until a purification ceremony has been completed ("must wash his clothes").

These two phrases occur for the first time in the context of uncleanness. Indeed, most of their appearances together refer to touching sick or dead creatures and becoming unclean (11:24 – 25, 27 – 28, 31 – 32, 39 – 40; 14:46; 15:5 – 8, 10 – 11, 16 – 19, 21 – 23, 27; 17:15; 22:6; Nu 19:7 – 8, 10, 21 – 22). The act of washing one's clothes occurs in conjunction with the ceremony of preparing for God's appearance at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19:10 – 15. There it forms part of the means by which the people "sanctify" (*qdš*, GK 7731) themselves. Such acts symbolize in outward form the need to remain separate from agents of death and from death itself. Rather than providing a nod to modern-day concerns of health, the text recognizes any violator of the covenant as in need of remaining cut off from the community for a certain period of time and afterward as able to reenter that community. It recognizes the significance of that act through washing one's clothes.

Thus the washing ceremony appears to signify advancement in holiness or proximity to God. It occurs when transferring from an unclean state outside God's people to one of full membership and participation in the community, and when moving from membership in that community to special experiences with God (Ex 19). This forms the background for the view of Christian baptism that the NT writers take in seeing it as a removal of the impurities of sin that separate one from God (1Pe 3:21) and in associating it with Christ's death and with an end to any obligations of avoiding foods and other aspects of OT uncleanness (Col 2:11 – 23).

NOTES

13 – 19 For most of this information see the lexicons, especially *HALOT* and Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 662 – 64. Driver (“Birds in the Old Testament”) notes that of the first eighteen raptors (eaters of live or dead prey), the first fifteen are land birds and the last three live at the sea. The hoopoe and bat are unclean because of their dirty habits and inedibility.

24 – 25 The application of the uncleanness category to creatures previously designated only as “detestable” does not betray proof of a redactor revising a text in conformity with the parallel discussion in Deuteronomy 14 (as some suggest). The presence of a Hithpael stem for the verb in v.24 argues against this. Such a stem appears nowhere in Deuteronomy 14, nor does it occur earlier in Leviticus 11 (or earlier in the Pentateuch). Yet it does occur many times later in Leviticus (11:43; 18:24, 30; 21:1, 3, 11). If redactors were at work, they would have added a text in conformity with the language that preceded 11:24 and in parallel with their primary text of Deuteronomy 14.

5. Land Animals, Part II (11:26 – 45)

OVERVIEW

The return to a focus on land animals in the second part of this chapter reflects the fact that Israel had much greater interaction with them than with other animals. Clearly this remained true during the wilderness wanderings, but also after the occupation of the Promised Land. Though the land included an extensive seacoast, Israel did not possess a great harbor, such as Tyre and Sidon farther north, nor did it often occupy the regions along the coast. These remained in the hands of Canaanites, Philistines, and other peoples.

Further, though the occupation of fowler was well known in surrounding

cultures, it receives scant attention in the Bible, appearing only four times in poetic contexts where escape from danger is likened to escape from the fowler's trap (Jer 5:26; Hos 9:8; Ps 91:3; Pr 6:5). Compare this with twenty-one occurrences of the root "to hunt, prey" (*s.yd*, GK 4090). Israel often encountered land animals, and as a pastoral people their livelihood depended on the breeding and care of these animals.

> [26]" 'Every animal that has a split hoof not completely divided or that does not chew the cud is unclean for you; whoever touches the carcass of any of them will be unclean. [27]Of all the animals that walk on all fours, those that walk on their paws are unclean for you; whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening. [28]Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening. They are unclean for you.
>
> [29]" 'Of the animals that move about on the ground, these are unclean for you: the weasel, the rat, any kind of great lizard, [30]the gecko, the monitor lizard, the wall lizard, the skink and the chameleon. [31]Of all those that move along the ground, these are unclean for you. Whoever touches them when they are dead will be unclean till evening. [32]When one of them dies and falls on something, that article, whatever its use, will be unclean, whether it is made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth. Put it in water; it will be unclean till evening, and then it will be clean. [33]If one of them falls into a clay pot, everything in it will be unclean, and you must break the pot. [34]Any food that could be eaten but has water on it from such a pot is unclean, and any liquid that could be drunk from it is unclean. [35]Anything that one of their carcasses falls on becomes unclean; an oven or cooking pot must be broken up. They are unclean, and you are to regard them as unclean. [36]A spring, however, or a cistern for collecting water remains clean, but anyone who touches one of these carcasses is unclean. [37]If a carcass falls on any seeds that are to be planted, they remain clean. [38]But if water has been put on the seed and a carcass falls on it, it is unclean for you.
>
> [39]" 'If an animal that you are allowed to eat dies, anyone who touches the carcass will be unclean till evening. [40]Anyone who eats some of the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening. Anyone who picks up the carcass must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean till evening.

41“ ‘Every creature that moves about on the ground is detestable; it is not
to be eaten. 42You are not to eat any creature that moves about on the
ground, whether it moves on its belly or walks on all fours or on many feet;
it is detestable. 43Do not defile yourselves by any of these creatures. Do not
make yourselves unclean by means of them or be made unclean by them.
44I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am
holy. Do not make yourselves unclean by any creature that moves about on
the ground. 45I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your
God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.

COMMENTARY

26 – 28 This passage begins with an introduction directly tied to the conclusion of the previous section, which summarized treatment of the carcasses of all types of animals (vv.24 – 25). Here, as before, a general summary of the unclean types of animals precedes the mention of specific examples of such animals.

Verses 26 – 27a list two categories of land animals that are unclean. Verse 26 closely follows v.3 with the introduction of negatives indicating that the absence of a split hoof or cud chewing qualifies the animal for the unclean category. Verse 27a introduces another general criterion related to the first: those animals that use their “paws” (lit., “hands”; *kap*) for locomotion, instead of four legs with split hooves, are unclean. The use of the same term as that for human hands may suggest that these creatures resemble people too closely to be used for food. Verses 27b – 28 virtually repeat the wording of vv.24 – 25. This emphasizes the point of these verses about touching and carrying carcasses, and it also provides a link in the transition to further details about unclean animals and their carcasses.

29 – 30 The text specifies eight additional land animals as unclean (neither to be eaten nor their carcasses touched), all according to the principles already enumerated. As with the list of vv.13 – 19, these can be summarized in a chart:

weasel	*ḥōled*	mole or rat
rat	*ʿakbār*	mouse
great lizard	*ṣāb*	thorn-tailed lizard, or general term for lizards
gecko	*ʾnāqā* (onomatopoetic)	
monitor lizard	*kōaḥ*	LXX chameleon
wall lizard	*ʿṭāʾā*	gecko (?); LXX newt
skink	*ḥōmeṭ*	reptile
chameleon	*tinšemet* (related to "snort"?)	homonym appears as a bird in v.18

31Verses 31 – 38 provide the most detailed discussion in Leviticus regarding the carcass of an unclean animal and what it means to touch or be touched by it. There are three general areas this section con-siders: containers (vv.32 – 33), food and water prepared for eating and drinking (vv.34 – 35), and food and water before it is prepared (vv.36 – 38).

Verse 31 acts as a transition. It belongs as much to the preceding section as it does to this one. It summarizes the creatures that "move along the ground" and notes that their carcasses render unclean any Israelite who touches them (cf. vv.24 – 26). This statement provides a title for the verses that follow by signaling the discussion of uncleanness as conveyed by carcasses. Practically, these verses concern the danger of contamination by various types of lizards and rodents that might be found in a kitchen and in the vessels used there for food preparation.

32 A dead animal that touches anything "made of wood, cloth, hide or sackcloth" renders that object unclean. As with the requirement that people wash their clothes and remain unclean until the evening, the solution here involves placing the object in water and allowing it to remain until evening, when it becomes clean. Alternatively, one must smash a clay jar. Uncleanness can apparently seep into the clay and contaminate the pot (or stove, v.35;Wright, 93 – 113).

33 The reference to an animal's falling into a pot means that the pot is unclean and cannot contain clean water or food; therefore, the pot must be destroyed. But there is no similar regulation for an unclean animal's touching the outside of a pot. This limits the number of pots that need to be destroyed, allows a means to preserve one's vessels by sealing the pot at its opening, and eliminates the almost impossible task of ensuring that no unclean rodent or lizard ever touches the outside of cooking ware, even when the family is not watching. It also provides the background to Jesus' criticism of those religious leaders who appear clean on the outside but do not worry about the true area of concern —the heart attitudes

of the inside (Mt 23:5 – 6; Lk 11:39).

34 – 35 These verses move on to the topic of food and drink, again tying in with what has gone before. The vessels noted here are the containers for storing food already described in vv.32 – 33. This time, however, the concern is not the containers but the food and water they hold. These also become unclean when the container touches a carcass.

36 This verse considers the source of water in “a spring” or “a cistern.” The note that these remain clean makes no sense unless someone discovers an animal’s carcass in them; otherwise it would not be mentioned, as everyone would assume that these water holders remain clean by themselves. But a dead animal does not render the whole water supply unclean. This is fortunate, since it would be difficult to remedy such a situation and could easily lead to the abandonment of a whole town or even a city. Wenham, 179, wisely connects the second half of v.36 with the first half and argues that the situation envisioned involves someone who fishes out the unclean animal. That person becomes unclean, but the water source remains useable.

37 – 38 Having considered the source of water, the text turns its attention to a possible source of food: the seeds used for sowing. If these remain dry, the carcass of an animal cannot “contaminate” them. If they are wet, however, they become “unclean.” Why? Most argue that the water allows the pollution of the animal to penetrate the seed. This modern explanation is possible, but v.34 has already established that water serves as a means of conveying uncleanness in pots and containers; therefore, it can convey the same uncleanness when in touch with dry food such as seed. Thus water has the property of conveying uncleanness when it comes into contact with dry food, just as it can wash away uncleanness when unclean people wash their clothes and when unclean vessels are immersed in it. Again, it becomes an appropriate symbol in the NT for regeneration (see above).

39 – 40 The text considers clean animals that Israel may eat. The carcasses of these animals subject anyone who encounters them to the same degree of uncleanness as that of unclean animals. As in vv.24 – 26 and 31 – 32, touching the carcass means that the person remains unclean until the evening. Handling the carcass in any way requires Israelites to wash their clothes, too. In the midst

of this text, however, an additional clause is added. Since Israelites may eat from these animals, any such eating of a dead animal renders them unclean in the same manner as if they had handled them. Is this true of every dead animal? No — only the ones that people discover have died without proper butchering, such as takes place at the altar.

41 – 45 The final section of the land animals focuses on "every creature that moves about on the ground." The root of both the noun and the verb is the same, šrṣ (GK 9237). It is sometimes translated "swarm." This root occurs twenty-nine times in the Hebrew Bible, beginning with the waters "swarming" with "swarms" of creatures in Genesis 1:20 – 21. It has already described water creatures (v.10) and winged insects (v.20). Now the text applies this root to land animals. Douglas, 159 – 75, notes its usage in Exodus 1:7 to describe how the Israelites multiplied and increased their numbers. There it fulfills the creation mandate to fill the earth (Ge 1:26 – 28). In fact, this term can be translated as "teem" rather than "swarm." In other words, it describes creatures that reproduce rapidly and fill the landscape quickly.

These creatures are "unclean" because they represent models of fulfillment of God's commands in Genesis 1 regarding animals' (as well as people's) becoming fruitful and multiplying in their numbers (v.22). To eat or use the carcasses of these animals interferes with their obedience to God's will. This explains the unusual use of the same term for all three spheres — water, air, and land. It explains the emphasis on land animals (Lev 11:41 – 44). These creatures exemplify the life that God has created and wants to continue.

Verse 42 lists other categories of unclean animals alongside the ones already mentioned. As with those of vv.26 – 30, these do not follow the customary means of land locomotion. Some crawl on their bellies, a clear connection to the only other reference to the word "belly" (gāḥôn, GK 1623) in the Bible (Ge 3:14, the cursing of the serpent). Actually, the resemblance does not stop with this rare word. In addtion, the same verbal root and preposition appear in both verses. Thus the uncleanness of the snake and other similar creatures reflects its curse by God as much as any matter of locomotion.

Other unacceptable means of locomotion include those animals that walk on all fours and those that have many legs. The former have already received

attention (vv.20, 27). The latter include a variety of insects. These categories attempt to provide general coverage for every type of land animal so that the exception of v.3 — animals that may be eaten — is truly unique.

The fourfold prohibition against "swarming" or "teeming" creatures comes to an end in v.44. Here it forms the center of an "envelope construction" in which the self-identification of God as holy precedes (v.44a) and follows (v.45) this prohibition. Both texts are virtually identical: "I am the LORD your God . . . be holy, because I am holy." The first statement includes a further command to Israel to consecrate itself. The second statement further identifies God as the one who brought Israel from Egypt.

Thus these statements relate the holiness of God to these swarming, teeming creatures. They must be respected and not eaten. Furthermore, they are related to God's holiness. He protects them in this way and demonstrates through them the command to be fruitful and multiply. How reminiscent this is of the protection and concern God has for all creation, as suggested by Jesus as a means to draw his disciples away from the cares of the world to focus on eternal matters, which have so much greater value in the end (Mt 10:29, 31; Lk 12:26 – 27).

NOTES

29 The mouse (Heb. *ʿakbār*) occurs with cognates in Akkadian and (especially in personal names) in Hebrew, Phoenician, and Ammonite. A second-millennium BC West Semitic attestation may occur as a personal name in Egyptian hierogyphs on a stele in the British Museum (James E. Hoch, *Semitic Words in Egyptian Texts of the New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994], 81, no. 96). The great lizard (Heb. *ṣāb*) appears in Egyptian hieroglyphs as a New Kingdom feminine personal name, "the lizard" (*T3-sá-bu*).

35 The "cooking pot" (*kîr* [GK 3968] with a dual ending) occurs only here in Hebrew, but it appears in Akkadian and Aramaic as well as later Semitic languages. See Kaufman, 65, who distinguishes it from *kur*m*u*. Paul Mankowski (*Akkadian Loanwords in Biblical Hebrew* [HSS 47; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000], 67 – 69) identifies the word in Sumerian and Akkadian as a

kiln. It is best understood here as a cooking device rather than a container for holding food. The latter appears in vv.32 – 34, while the context of v.35 suggests devices for food preparation. The dual form of this noun may reflect a stove of some type that holds two cooking containers (Holladay, 156; *m. Šabb*. 3.1).

6. Summary of the Law of Unclean Animals (11:46 – 47)

> 46“ ‘These are the regulations concerning animals, birds, every living thing that moves in the water and every creature that moves about on the ground. 47You must distinguish between the unclean and the clean, between living creatures that may be eaten and those that may not be eaten.’ ”

COMMENTARY

46 – 47 A few comments conclude this study of the unclean and clean animals. First is a stress on the teeming animals. Indeed the phrase in v.46 is worded in such a way that all land and water animals can be understood as “teeming.” If so, this extends the principle of their fruitfulness from some key examples to a model of entire realms of the animal kingdom.

Second, the command to “distinguish” in v.47 also recalls the creation account of Genesis 1. There the same verb appears repeatedly to describe God’s distinction of the sky, waters, and dry land in the first three days of creation (Ge 1:4, 6 – 7, 14, 18). Here that activity now belongs to those created in the image of God. The principle of distinguishing good and evil, or right and wrong, lies at the heart of moral and ethical choice. It is the center of wisdom (Ps 1).

Third, the difference between clean and unclean is defined in v.47 solely by what may be eaten and what may not be eaten. There is no necessary evil inherent in these animals. Instead, they make up a special category of animals protected by God.

NOTES

47 For further connections with Genesis 1 – 3 as well as 6 – 9 and Deuteronomy 14, see Jiøí Moskala, *The Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature,Theology and Rationale* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society, 2000).

B. Childbirth (12:1 – 8)

OVERVIEW

Turning from foods to childbirth, ch. 12 continues the theme of impurity. Indeed, this change signals what the rest of the section on impurities will consider. Ch. 11 dealt with the whole of the animal kingdom; chs. 12 – 15 focus on people. Even in this section there is a pattern, for chs. 12 (childbirth) and 15 (genital discharges) consider uncleanness related to sexual matters; between these sections, chs. 13 (diagnosis) and 14 (cleanness) deal with skin diseases.

Thus these texts consider the human body in terms of reproduction and external, visible diseases — all matters related to the observable, physical body, just as the distinctions between clean and unclean animals related to observable features of their bodies. As mentioned before, the "unclean" aspect of these matters does not mean that someone has sinned; rather, one can interpret the term as creating divisions and barriers that protect from predators the thing so designated (as the animals in ch. 11 are protected from being killed and eaten by Israel). What is not explicit in these texts is who or from what the people so declared are protected.

It is important to note that the discussion here is not against sex nor is it morbidly interested in bodily fluids; rather, the focus is on the loss of life-giving fluids and on death (J. Milgrom, "The Rationale for Biblical Impurity," *JANESCU* 22 [1993]: 107 – 11). Douglas, 178 – 79. comments:

> The Leviticus writer has a bad name as a formalist, intent on minute observance of ritual, also as excessively preoccupied with sex and disease. Here it may be remarked that religions which ritualize sex are usually more in favour of it than against. To suppose that the numerous sexual regulations of Leviticus exhibit a narrowly puritanical attitude to sex would be like expecting a culture with

numerous food rules to condemn good food. It is where sex is recognized as a potent elemental force, at once the source of desire, fulfilment, and danger, that religion seeks to appropriate sex and to bind it with rules. Compared with other religious teachers the Leviticus writer is not unusually high-minded, obsessed with cleanliness or sex-denying. Toilet practices, discharge of fluids, and physical impurities do not interest him as such. True to God's compassionate concern with fertility his strong interest is in reproduction. He has used a strict principle of selection to focus exclusively on three topics: on a woman's discharge of blood, menstruating or post-parturient; on leprosy; and on male and female genital discharges. These are the only medical topics in the book.

Ch. 12 divides into two main parts: uncleanness associated with childbirth (vv.1 – 5) and the sacrifice necessary to restore association with the covenantal community (vv.6 – 8). Each of these has two parts: the first has a complete description of exactly what happens and the second discusses an alternative or an exception. Thus:

I. Uncleanness at Childbirth (vv.1 – 5)
A. Male Child (vv.1 – 4)
B. Female Child (v.5)
II. Restoration of Cleanness (vv.6 – 8)
A. Offering (vv.6 – 7)
B. Offering for a Poor Person (v.8)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Say to the Israelites: 'A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. [3]On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. [4]Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. [5]If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purifired from her bleeding.

[6]" 'When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. [7]He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood.

" 'These are the regulations for the woman who gives birth to a boy or a girl. [8]If she cannot afford a lamb, she is to bring two doves or two young pigeons, one for a burnt offering and the other for a sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for her, and she will be clean.' "

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a For vv.1 – 2a as a marker introducing a new section in these chapters, see comment on 11:1 – 2a. Other than this, the major questions that arise in this section are: (1) Why is the woman unclean? (2) What differences exist between the male and female child as far as the cleanness of the mother is concerned? (3) Why is there a difference between the number of days of uncleanness for a boy and a girl? These questions are interrelated.

The reason for the uncleanness lies in the activities that the woman experiences. She gives birth. As with the animals of ch. 11, this is a fulfillment of God's creation command to multiply and fill the earth. Also as in ch. 11, where the "teemers" of the sea, air, and land were unclean, so here in Leviticus 12 women who give birth become unclean. Moreover, where the "uncleanness" protected the animals from Israelites who would otherwise kill them (for food or other purposes), so here the uncleanness may provide protection for their lives.

But where is the danger? This is not clear. Douglas suggests that dark or demonic forces were feared but that Leviticus would not voice these fears explicitly. While this may be possible and does have parallels with other religions, the absence of a parallel in the biblical text makes it difficult to accept unless all other possibilities have been ruled out.

There is one example in the Pentateuch where the family of a newborn Israelite baby is threatened, and the solution is circumcision. The one doing the threatening is not a demon (though some commentators want to find a demon in a hypothetical Urtext) but a supernatural being. The account concerns Moses' family on their return from Midian to Egypt in Exodus 4:24 – 26. In this text God seeks to kill Moses. It recalls Genesis 17 and God's covenant with Abraham and all of his descendants that all males must be circumcised. The warning that any who are not circumcised "will be cut off from his people" recalls the same phrase in Leviticus 7:20 (see above) and its equivalence to a death sentence. That this was involved in Exodus 4 seems likely despite the fact that the danger lay with Moses rather than the uncircumcised child. The circumcision was Moses' responsibility.

The same is true in Leviticus 12. The circumcision is the responsibility of the

parents and especially here with the mother who gives birth (just as Zipporah circumcised her child). For the seven days until the circumcision, the mother cannot approach God or his people because, as in Exodus 4, an uncircumcised male child puts both the child and its family in danger.

Why then must the mother remain "unclean" for an additional thirty-three days after the circumcision? Though there are examples of the numbers thirty-three and especially forty used elsewhere in the Bible, there is no clear parallel. But it seems that the danger of the lack of circumcision is not removed immediately at the moment of circumcision but remains for some time afterward. The mother remains separated from the sanctuary for four times as long after the circumcision as before it. It is almost as though the days that the child is not circumcised are days stolen from the presence of God and that this requires fourfold recompense, as happens with a thief who steals a sheep in the Covenant Code. The thief must restore four times as many sheep as are stolen in Exodus 22:1 [21:37]. The penalty for stealing an ox is a fivefold restoration. Perhaps in the case of childbirth the more merciful payment is demanded.

If this is true, it does not clarify why the days of uncleanness double for a daughter. One might argue that the absence of the possibility of circumcision with a female child removes that sign of the covenant and places the mother (and daughter and father?) in greater danger. But there is no parallel to the Exodus 4 story that suggests any divine displeasure at the birth of a female child. Further, Leviticus remains silent as to explanations for any of this. It concerns itself with the practical requirements for preserving the newborn life and the family and with maintaining fellowship with God.

2b – 4 The text uses the example of the male child to provide all the detail. It includes three sections that the discussion of the birth of a female child omits. First there is the note, "A woman who becomes pregnant." The verb uses the same root (זרע, GK 2445) as that of "seed" in 11:37 – 38. This establishes a verbal connection with the previous chapter — a stylistic device that is not necessary to repeat with the female child.

The second difference is v.3, in which the mother sees to the circumcision of her son. The daughter is not circumcised, and so there is no note regarding it. But that circumcision plays a key role in the matter of uncleanness is suggested

by its appearance at the dividing point between the first seven days, when any contact with the community of Israel is forbidden, and the remaining thirty-three days, during which only contact with the sanctuary and its holy things is forbidden. This same distinction occurs with the daughter, though the number of days is doubled since the daughter is not circumcised.

The third difference occurs in v.4b, where the meaning of "days of purification" becomes clear as the woman is forbidden access to the sanctuary and the holy things. The same is true for the days of purification after the birth of a daughter and is not repeated. Indeed, the discussion for the birth of a daughter (v.5) repeats only those phrases where a different gender (female rather than male) or number (double that for a boy) must be inserted.

5 Though the details are never clarified, it appears that the chief concerns of the text lie in human fruitfulness (Ge 1:26 – 28) and circumcision as a sign of God's covenantal promise to Abraham that his seed will be numerous (Ge 17). As in Leviticus 11, where fruitfulness with animals was associated with "uncleanness," so it is here. As in ch. 11, where the "unclean" state protected the animals from possible death, so the story of Exodus 4 suggests that something similar may happen with human births in the covenantal community. Finally, the additional time of removal from full fellowship with God after the circumcision and the doubling of all of this time with the birth of a daughter may imply extensions of these principles, but exactly how or why is not explicit in the text.

Nevertheless, the ambiguity does not allow for conclusions that use this passage as a proof text for a patriarchal society in which boys have greater value than girls. There is simply too little known about the reasoning behind the procedures applied here. Further, as the following section suggests, the actual restoration of the mother to the sanctuary involves the same sacrifice, whether her child is male or female (also Hartley, 169).

6 – 8 The following verses describe the offering the mother presents after her days of purification. "A year-old lamb for a burnt offering" recalls the use of a year-old lamb at the Passover (Ex 12:5). In addition two lambs, each a year old, were offered on the altar every day during the priests' consecration (Ex 29:38). Thus, this is an appropriate animal sacrifice to the Lord (as a burnt offering, see Lev 1:10 – 13). The use of "a young pigeon or a dove for a purification offering"

occurs repeatedly in contexts of uncleanness (Lev 5:7; 14:22; 15:14, 29; Nu 6:10). The same is true of the note in v.8 that considers a condition of poverty where the mother cannot afford the lamb (Lev 5:7, 11).

Theologically, this demonstrates how the principle of special care and provision for those who are poor begins at the temple with the worship of God (Isa 58:6 – 7; Zec 7:10; Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; 2Co 9:9). Sociologically, it calls into question portrayals of Israelite women as drawn into prostitution to pay for vows and other sacrifices at the sanctuary (van der Toorn, 193 – 205).

Verse 7 is key for understanding the purpose of these sacrifices. The offering makes "atonement" to make the mother "ceremonially clean from her flow of blood." As in 1:4 (see comments) and elsewhere, atonement cleanses and restores a relationship between God and the woman. There is nothing inherently sinful or unclean about the loss of blood — consider, for example, a minor cut or a nosebleed. A mother's "flow of blood," rather, is unclean because of its association with birth, in which the blood flows from a reproductive organ but is not apparently used to nourish the new life.

As will be seen in Leviticus 15, the same is true of menstrual blood and of male emissions of semen. All of these render the one who produces them unclean and in need of reconciliation with God. Fertility and reproduction are powerful gifts from God, and any appearance of wasting or not using them for their intended purpose, viz., the creation and nourishment of new life, introduces a state of uncleanness.

NOTES

2 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 744 – 45) compares the seven days with a special seventh-day ritual among the Hittites for newborns, and he relates *niddâ* ("menstrual," GK 5614) to a root meaning "to discharge, expel" that refers not only to the blood but to the woman herself. Alternatively, Whitekettle ("Leviticus 12 and the Israelite Woman: Ritual Process, Liminality and the Womb," *ZAW* 107 [1995]: 393 – 408; idem, "Levitical Thought and the Female Reproductive Cycle: Wombs, Wellsprings, and the Primeval World," *VT* 46 [1996]: 376 – 92) argues that Israel understood the mother as incapable of

reproduction during her uncleanness and therefore unfit to enter the sanctuary. But this is not explicit in the text.

3 The timing of the circumcision (on the eighth day) may have distinguished it from the neighboring Semitic peoples who also practiced this rite (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 747).

5 – 8 Like Israel, Hittite birth rituals defined the mother as in a state of uncleanness longer for a daughter than a son and required both a pigeon or dove for a purification offering as well as a lamb. But the impurity for the Hittites concerned both mother and child. In Israel, the impurity only concerned the mother. But Magonet, 144 – 52, observes the phenomenon of discharges from infant girls and argues that the double impurity of mother and child explains the longer period.

Some suggest that this is related to some sort of respect for the power and mystery of female fertility (Levine, *Leviticus*, 249 – 50). Others contend this is a polemic against surrounding idolatrous nations that underlines the importance of women in Israel. In any case, as M. Gruber ("Women in the Cult according to the Priestly Code," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Neusner [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987], 35 – 48) notes, the degree of uncleanness demonstrates nothing about social status.

REFLECTION

More than any other passage in the Bible, these verses demonstrate the important role of bearing children. It is protected by God and, despite the presence of sin in the human condition, remains of special value, which the NT recognizes in the mother of Jesus and in the ongoing bearing of children within the Christian community (Lk 1:41 – 55; 1Ti 2:15).

C. Skin Diseases Diagnosed (13:1 – 59)

OVERVIEW

Leviticus 13 and 14 discuss skin diseases. Ch. 13 describes symptoms that render a person diseased and therefore unclean. It also delineates evidence of change that can lead to the healing of the person and the pronouncement of him or her as clean. Ch. 14 discusses the offerings necessary for the full reentry into the holy community of Israel. Thus ch. 13 concerns the disease and ch. 14 considers the means of acceptance by God and Israel after recovery from the disease. There is no discussion of either a treatment or a cure of the skin disease. The biblical material does not advance human medical knowledge beyond what was known at the time.

If the concern of ch. 13 is diagnosis, what relation does this have with childbirth in Leviticus 12? Both consider changes in the human body that are not routine. With the birth of children, there is discharge of blood and other fluids. With the presence of skin disease, there is change in the color and texture of the skin. The uncleanness in both cases describes something associated with the human body and is visible.

Douglas, 178 – 85, offers an intriguing suggestion about the association of these matters with the teeming animals of ch. 11, but there is no vocabulary linkage to support her thesis. Further, it is necessary to explain the presence of discoloration on objects, stones, and house walls as described at the end of chs. 13 – 14. These can only be understood as continuations of the principle of visible uncleanness in the covenantal community.

Leviticus 13 reflects a structure similar to the sacrifices. First, the most general and all-purpose skin disease is described (vv.1 – 8). It is meant to be inclusive of the others. The inspection of the priest and the process by which he declares it healed or unclean are presented in detail. The pronouncement of clean is followed by the pronouncement of unclean. The following sections repeat this order, though they do so only where there is a change in the appearance of the skin disease for declaring it clean or unclean. Different types of skin disease are described: a white swelling disease (vv.9 – 11), a disease covering all the skin (vv.12 – 16), a boil with subsequent discoloration (vv.18 – 23), a burn with discoloration (vv.24 – 28), a head sore (vv.29 – 37), white spots (vv.38 – 39), and a sore on a bald spot (vv.40 – 44).

Then follows a discussion of how a person with a skin disease should live (vv.45 – 46). As in the process of diagnosis already discussed for diseases, the pronouncement of mildew on surfaces is considered (vv.47 – 59). Again there is a priestly observation, a waiting period, a pronouncement of clean or unclean, and a purging of the tainted surfaces.

The identification of the skin diseases has changed over the years. For a long time it was assumed that leprosy was being described here. But that is unlikely, given the slow progress of the disease and its irreversible nature. Leprosy is not the main disease specified here. But there is no reason to conclude that the identification of the diseases is completely ambiguous (so perhaps Gerstenberger, 156 – 57; but see 158). Certainly the symptoms could describe skin cancer and other serious diseases.

But the commonly agreed-upon diseases, given the descriptions and what is known of diseases in the second and early first millennia BC Levant, include psoriasis for most of the skin diseases, vitiligo for the spreading skin disease (vv.12 – 17), circumscribed scleroderma (vv.18 – 23), favus (or another of the ringworm afflictions) for the sore on the head (vv.29 – 37); and papules, herpes simplex, or vitiligo for the white spots (vv.38 – 39; Harrison, 136 – 45; Wenham, 196 – 97). The purpose of these chapters is not to diagnose the disease but to distinguish symptoms that are unclean from those that are clean.

1. General Skin Disease (13:1 – 8)

[1]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [2]"When anyone has a swelling or a rash or a bright spot on his skin that may become an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons who is a priest. [3]The priest is to examine the sore on his skin, and if the hair in the sore has turned white and the sore appears to be more than skin deep, it is an infectious skin disease. When the priest examines him, he shall pronounce him ceremonially unclean. [4]If the spot on his skin is white but does not appear to be more than skin deep and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest is to put the infected person in isolation for seven days. [5]On the seventh day the priest is to examine him, and if he sees that the sore

is unchanged and has not spread in the skin, he is to keep him in isolation another seven days. [6]On the seventh day the priest is to examine him again, and if the sore has faded and has not spread in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a rash. The man must wash his clothes, and he will be clean. [7]But if the rash does spread in his skin after he has shown himself to the priest to be pronounced clean, he must appear before the priest again. [8]The priest is to examine him, and if the rash has spread in the skin, he shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infectious disease.

COMMENTARY

1 – 8 This section describes a variety of abnormalities that may arise on the skin. This includes both eruptions or swellings as well as changes in color. The purpose of the passive form at the end of v.2 is not to suggest that the person may be brought to the priest against his or her will (Gerstenberger, 159) but to assert that the examination takes place at the sanctuary and before God. The priest conducts the examination of the spot based on the color of the hair in the spot. There follows either a pronouncement of uncleanness or a quarantine of seven days. The victim must pass two more tests, at the end of seven days and again at the end of fourteen days. Only if there is no spread of the disease evident will the priest declare the victim clean. But if it spreads at a later time, another examination follows and the priest will declare the person unclean.

Two items should be mentioned with regard to this description. First, in its form it represents something of a logical flow chart, with the response of the priest determining what happens next. At each step there are two possibilities, clean or unclean. This type of literature is unusual in the Bible and in the ancient world. Unlike omen literature, this does not lead to a prediction or some sort of formula that has to be recited for healing. Indeed, this text is not interested in healing but in the spread of the disease.

Second, the disease’s spreading becomes obvious through changing the skin around it, and this manifests uncleanness. In this case it is dangerous for the victim and potentially infectious for the community. But like the fertility and spread of bodily fluids in chs. 12 and 15 and like the teeming animals in ch. 11, the focus on what is unclean depends on the ability of the thing to spread. The

disease excludes the sufferer from society and mandates the destruction of all clothing that touched the person (v.6).

NOTES

1 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 772) suggests that this chapter was not explicitly commanded to be taught to the Israelites, lest they would begin their own diagnoses rather than seeking out the more experienced priests.

2 The terms used here include *śᵉʾēt* (“discoloration,” GK 8421), *sappaḥat* (“scab,” GK 6204), *baheret* (“shiny mark,” GK 994), and *śāraʿat* (“scaly,” GK 7669; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 773 – 74). The last term was translated by the Septuagint as *lepra* and by the Vulgate as *lepra*. In the classical world this term referred to a variety of skin diseases as described here. Only in the last few centuries did it become equated with Hansen’s disease, which in Hellenistic Greek was known as *elephantiasis*.

Though there are varying opinions, there seems to be no anthropological evidence for the latter in Palestine before the time of Alexander. (Kenneth V. Mull V. and Carolyn S. Mull, “Biblical Leprosy — Is It Really?” *BRev* 8, no. 2 [1992]: 32 – 39, 62 suggest that some biblical examples may preserve Hansen’s disease; but see M. L. Davies, “Levitical Leprosy: Uncleanness and the Psyche,” *ExpTim* 99 [1988)]: 136 – 39.) Psoriasis is a noninfectious disease characterized by reddish raised patches on the skin that do not otherwise affect the health of the sufferer. It is found in less than 1 percent of the population in warmer climates. Favus is an infectious fungus that damages skin and hair (S. G. Browne, *Leprosy in the Bible* [London: Christian Medical Fellowship, 1970]; Hulse, 87 – 105).

3 Noting that skin diseases do not turn hair white, Hulse, 98, suggests the scales from the skin fastened themselves to the hair.

4 This quarantine period is not effectual for the treatment period of any skin disease, nor are skin diseases generally contagious, unlike many other diseases (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 816 – 26). The scaly disease may be a collection of

ailments, but the concern is with the death of the skin. Thus the bearer is treated like a corpse, with similar restrictions.

2. White Swelling Skin Disease (13:9 – 11)

[9]"When anyone has an infectious skin disease, he must be brought to the priest. [10]The priest is to examine him, and if there is a white swelling in the skin that has turned the hair white and if there is raw fl esh in the swelling, [11]it is a chronic skin disease and the priest shall pronounce him unclean. He is not to put him in isolation, because he is already unclean.

COMMENTARY

9 – 11 A swollen white part of the skin, compounded with raw skin in its midst, identifies this disease. The latter allows no quarantine because of the virulence of the disease.

NOTE

10 Hulse, 98, suggests the redness is due to bleeding where the psoriasis has rubbed off.

3. Spreading Skin Disease (13:12 – 17)

[12]"If the disease breaks out all over his skin and, so far as the priest can see, it covers all the skin of the infected person from head to foot, [13]the priest is to examine him, and if the disease has covered his whole body, he shall pronounce that person clean. Since it has all turned white, he is clean. [14]But whenever raw flesh appears on him, he will be unclean. [15]When the priest sees the raw flesh, he shall pronounce him unclean. The raw flesh is unclean; he has an infectious disease. [16]Should the raw flesh change and turn white, he must go to the priest. [17]The priest is to examine him, and if

the sores have turned white, the priest shall pronounce the infected person clean; then he will be clean.

COMMENTARY

12 – 17 If part of the flesh of a person is white and he or she can be pronounced unclean because of it, why is that same person clean when the whole of the skin is white? Perhaps the wholeness of the white diseased skin is somehow related to holiness. Alternatively, perhaps the whiteness here is somehow related to the falling away of scabs or other manifestations of a skin disease. The presence of fresh skin all over the body suggests that no part of the disease remains.

4. Boils (13:18 – 23)

18 “When someone has a boil on his skin and it heals, 19 and in the place
where the boil was, a white swelling or reddish-white spot appears, he must
present himself to the priest. 20 The priest is to examine it, and if it appears
to be more than skin deep and the hair in it has turned white, the priest shall
pronounce him unclean. It is an infectious skin disease that has broken out
where the boil was. 21 But if, when the priest examines it, there is no white
hair in it and it is not more than skin deep and has faded, then the priest is
to put him in isolation for seven days. 22 If it is spreading in the skin, the
priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is infectious. 23 But if the spot is
unchanged and has not spread, it is only a scar from the boil, and the priest
shall pronounce him clean.

COMMENTARY

18 – 23 The term for “boil” can also be “sore” (*šeḥîn*, GK 8825). Any significant change of the area on the skin can lead to a pronouncement of unclean. The seriousness of the change is determined by the priest’s examination to determine how deeply the new growth or color goes.

5. Burns (13:24 – 28)

24 “When someone has a burn on his skin and a reddish-white or white
spot appears in the raw fl esh of the burn, 25 the priest is to examine the spot,
and if the hair in it has turned white, and it appears to be more than skin
deep, it is an infectious disease that has broken out in the burn. The priest
shall pronounce him unclean; it is an infectious skin disease. 26 But if the
priest examines it and there is no white hair in the spot and if it is not more
than skin deep and has faded, then the priest is to put him in isolation for
seven days. 27 On the seventh day the priest is to examine him, and if it is
spreading in the skin, the priest shall pronounce him unclean; it is an
infectious skin disease. 28 If, however, the spot is unchanged and has not
spread in the skin but has faded, it is a swelling from the burn, and the
priest shall pronounce him clean; it is only a scar from the burn.

COMMENTARY

24 – 28 This section is virtually identical to vv.18 – 23, with the important difference lying only in the place where the priest looks for the disease, whether a boil or a burn. The particular term for “burn” occurs only here (*mikwat ʾēš*, but forms of the root occur elsewhere (Isa 43:2; Jer 23:29; and the *lex talionis* of Ex 21:25). See especially Proverbs 6:28 for an example of the sort of burning that the root of this verb may envision: “Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?”

6. Head Sore (13:29 – 37)

29 “If a man or woman has a sore on the head or on the chin, 30 the priest is
to examine the sore, and if it appears to be more than skin deep and the hair
in it is yellow and thin, the priest shall pronounce that person unclean; it is
an itch, an infectious disease of the head or chin. 31 But if, when the priest
examines this kind of sore, it does not seem to be more than skin deep and
there is no black hair in it, then the priest is to put the infected person in
isolation for seven days. 32 On the seventh day the priest is to examine the
sore, and if the itch has not spread and there is no yellow hair in it and it

does not appear to be more than skin deep, [33]he must be shaved except for the diseased area, and the priest is to keep him in isolation another seven days. [34]On the seventh day the priest is to examine the itch, and if it has not spread in the skin and appears to be no more than skin deep, the priest shall pronounce him clean. He must wash his clothes, and he will be clean. [35]But if the itch does spread in the skin after he is pronounced clean, [36]the priest is to examine him, and if the itch has spread in the skin, the priest does not need to look for yellow hair; the person is unclean. [37]If, however, in his judgment it is unchanged and black hair has grown in it, the itch is healed. He is clean, and the priest shall pronounce him clean.

COMMENTARY

29 – 30 The word for "sore" (Heb. root *mikwat* ʾēṯ, GK 5596) occurs 47 times in this chapter alone and some 228 in the Hebrew Bible. The word for "itch" (*neteq*, GK 5999) occurs 15 times in this chapter alone and 41 times in the Hebrew Bible. Both words possess a wider range of meaning than suggested by these translations. The first word refers to a plague, an infestation, or a blow. The translation "sore" could be included, but it is not necessarily limited to this sort of ailment. The second word normally refers to favus, scabies, or something similar associated with the head. Favus is supported by the yellowing of the hair. Two reasons may exist for shaving the area around the wound but not the wound itself: (1) to enable identification of the color of the hair growing in the wound; and (2) to determine if the infection has grown to the area shaved.

31 – 36 These verses have semantic and structural parallels to vv.4 – 8 (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 794).

NOTES

30 The "itch" (*neteq*) translates a "scall," where the hair follicles are torn from the scalp after splitting (Levine, 80).

33 Shaving and a successful diagnosis reintegrate the separated individual into

the community of Israel (Olyan, 619 – 20).

7. White Spots (13:38 – 39)

38 "When a man or woman has white spots on the skin, 39 the priest is to
examine them, and if the spots are dull white, it is a harmless rash that has
broken out on the skin; that person is clean.

COMMENTARY

38 – 39 The term "white spots" occurs only in Leviticus 13 (cf. vv.4, 19). Here it is similar to the skin on the boil of vv.18 – 23. The same expression for "dull" (Heb. root *khh*, GK 3910) in v.39 occurs in v.21. If this is vitiligo or leucoderma, the whiteness goes no deeper than the skin and is not defiling (Hulse, 95).

8. Sore on a Bald Spot (13:40 – 44)

40 "When a man has lost his hair and is bald, he is clean. 41 If he has lost
his hair from the front of his scalp and has a bald forehead, he is clean.
42 But if he has a reddish-white sore on his bald head or forehead, it is an
infectious disease breaking out on his head or forehead. 43 The priest is to
examine him, and if the swollen sore on his head or forehead is reddish-
white like an infectious skin disease, 44 the man is diseased and is unclean.
The priest shall pronounce him unclean because of the sore on his head.

COMMENTARY

40 – 44 This disease may resemble that of the Judean king Uzziah (2Ch 26:16 – 21). This sort of outbreak, on the forehead or the bald part of the head itself, may also evoke the picture of Elisha who, when mocked by the youths as a "baldhead," calls down a curse on them and they are attacked by bears. But if this event was an insult designed to accuse Elisha of being diseased and unclean,

it is nowhere specified. The word “diseased” (ṣārûaʿ, GK 7665) in v.44 is used in this chapter for the first time. It may describe a condition closer to Hansen’s disease than any of the other terms in this chapter.

9. Rules for Living with an Infectious Skin Disease (13:45 – 46)

> 45“The person with such an infectious disease must wear torn clothes, let his hair be unkempt, cover the lower part of his face and cry out, ‘Unclean! Unclean!’ 46As long as he has the infection he remains unclean. He must live alone; he must live outside the camp.

COMMENTARY

45 – 46 This second appearance of the word “diseased” (ṣārûaʿ; cf. v.44) may relate this ailment to the diagnosis of vv.40 – 44, though there is no reason to doubt that the general principles of community exclusion were not enforced for everyone declared unclean.

Five aspects of a diseased person are affected: clothing, hair, face, speech, and home. The clothing is to be torn. The hair must hang loose. These were forbidden to Aaron and his remaining sons after the death of Nadab and Abihu (10:6). Presumably they constituted the customary mourning ritual. They are also forbidden to the high priest (21:10). As noted in the comments on 10:6, the cleanliness and “order” of the hair symbolize the presence of the holy within the priests and of the lack of cleanness in the diseases that these people possess. The same is true of the torn clothes.

As for covering the mouth, this seems to be associated with mourning as well (Eze 24:17, 22). In Micah 3:7 it relates to shame and despising.With God as the subject, it describes someone who covers himself with a garment for defense (Ps 104:2; Isa 59:17). Others can be covered in shame (Pss 89:45; 109:29). Of special interest is 1 Samuel 28:14, in which the verb describes how Samuel wraps a robe around him, apparently to disguise himself. Thus the covering of the mouth can refer to concealing one’s identity and to shame.

Further, it may relate to the cry of “unclean” that proceeds from the covered mouth. In such circumstances, the sad situation of the afflicted remains one of a loss of personal identity and recognition and becomes a symbol of uncleanness in the presence of the holy congregation of Israel. The twofold “Unclean! Unclean!” (ṭāmēʾ ṭāmēʾ, GK 3237) repeats and emphasizes the state of the individual. It warns others nearby and perhaps, in its repetition, stresses the superlative nature of the state, viz., that this is the most unclean of diseases.

The fifth result of this status is the worst. The victims are separated from their own people and must live alone, away from society. Though this does not mean a death sentence, it is not much of an existence for a society that valued the community in work, worship, and all of life.

10. Mildew (13:47 – 59)

47“If any clothing is contaminated with mildew — any woolen or linen
clothing, 48any woven or knitted material of linen or wool, any leather or
anything made of leather —49and if the contamination in the clothing, or
leather, or woven or knitted material, or any leather article, is greenish or
reddish, it is a spreading mildew and must be shown to the priest. 50The
priest is to examine the mildew and isolate the affected article for seven
days. 51On the seventh day he is to examine it, and if the mildew has spread
in the clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather, whatever its
use, it is a destructive mildew; the article is unclean. 52He must burn up the
clothing, or the woven or knitted material of wool or linen, or any leather
article that has the contamination in it, because the mildew is destructive;
the article must be burned up.

53“But if, when the priest examines it, the mildew has not spread in the
clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or the leather article, 54he shall
order that the contaminated article be washed. Then he is to isolate it for
another seven days. 55After the affected article has been washed, the priest
is to examine it, and if the mildew has not changed its appearance, even
though it has not spread, it is unclean. Burn it with fire, whether the mildew
has affected one side or the other. 56If, when the priest examines it, the
mildew has faded after the article has been washed, he is to tear the
contaminated part out of the clothing, or the leather, or the woven or knitted

material. [57]But if it reappears in the clothing, or in the woven or knitted material, or in the leather article, it is spreading, and whatever has the mildew must be burned with fire. [58]The clothing, or the woven or knitted material, or any leather article that has been washed and is rid of the mildew, must be washed again, and it will be clean."

[59]These are the regulations concerning contamination by mildew in woolen or linen clothing, woven or knitted material, or any leather article, for pronouncing them clean or unclean.

COMMENTARY

47 – 59 Mildew corresponds to the skin diseases that have been discussed in several ways. It is subject to the same sort of criteria, especially in terms of color. More importantly, it is observable on the surface of the cloth and spreads like the skin diseases. These key similarities form the basis for the inclusion of this material along with skin diseases. The ability of fungus to spread as it does, as well as the already mentioned visibility on the cloth, correspond to the subjects of chs. 11 – 15. All have an interest in fertility and reproduction in term of externally visible growth.

As with the skin diseases, the concern is with diagnosis. There are similar priestly inspections and seven-day waiting periods. Here the concern extends to any "infection" that spreads or fails to diminish. In every case the infected area of the garment is removed. But wherever there is evidence of failure to diminish or disappear, the whole cloth is burnt so that the disease is destroyed and unable to infect anywhere else.

The phrase "warp or woof " (ʾô bištî ʾô bᵉʿērēb; NIV "woven or knitted") is unique to these verses and emphasizes the fact that the mildew has attached itself to the fabric of the garment in such a way as to render normal procedures for cleaning the cloth ineffective.

NOTES

47 – 49 Characteristically, Gerstenberger, 147 – 49, identifies a "prescientific" reason for this law. He argues that all ancient peoples believed that objects such as clothing had souls and, therefore, could become unclean just like people. Mere absence of textual support seems no impediment to this scholar, nor does the available understanding that it is not some imagined life ascribed to the garment that concerns the law, but the real life and growth of the mold. Like the skin diseases, the mold symbolizes an uncleanness that remained incompatible with the purity of God's people.

REFLECTIONs

While the issues surrounding skin disease and uncleanness have often been misinterpreted and misapplied to the pain and disadvantage of many individuals (Gerstenberger, 156), two points must be kept in mind. First, the concern of this text is to provide a holistic view of life and the world. Moral and ethical categories are not separate from physical or spiritual ones. For this reason, uncleanness in terms of injustice and other moral sin has a corollary in the physical world in disease. This is not to say that the same guilt rests on the bearer of these diseases; in fact, that is never the case. But all such uncleanness must be identified in a similar manner (by the priest) and dealt with so that the holiness of the people of God and their relationship are not compromised.

This holistic view of the world has a value today insofar as skin diseases and mildew provide symbols and teaching tools of the terrible effects of sin on one's spiritual life. Just as these diseases spread and destroy if they are not dealt with, so sin can spread in a person's life, destroy that life, and affect the lives of others who come into contact with it (Ro 1). The discussion of mildew (vv.47 – 58) reveals that this infection symbolizes sin but does not contain sin. The fabric with mildew is not guilty of any sin. Thus the connection between sin and disease is severed (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 808).

The second point is that Jesus never accepted any distinctions of uncleanness in terms of these diseases. Instead, his role was that of a healer of all of these and other illnesses, as the Gospels testify. In the same way that Christians learned to view all foods as clean and to use them, the same was true of these diseases. Christians are called to minister to the sick as their Master did (Mt 10:8; Lk 9:2;

10:9).

D. Cleanness from Skin Diseases (14:1 – 57)

OVERVIEW

Having diagnosed the diseases in Leviticus 13, ch. 14 considers the possibility of healing and the resulting ceremony of cleanness. As with the anointing and consecration of the priests and the diagnosis of the skin diseases, in the cleanness ceremony the priest directs all that is to be done. The process is marked by a period of seven days, followed by an eighth day on which the most important procedures occur. As Moses sacrificed animals and placed blood on the anointed priests in ch. 8, so the priest sacrifices animals and places the blood on the same parts of the body of the clean person in ch. 14. This similarity is no accident. Both of these ceremonies enable the participants to gain closer access to God, either as officiants in the holy places of the sanctuary or as full members in the holy community of Israel.

The text provides a title or summary of the ceremony's purpose in v.2. The actual ritual occurs on the first day (vv.2 – 8), the seventh day (v.9), and the eighth day (vv.10 – 20). A second part of the text considers an alternative ceremony for those too poor to afford the animals described in the first part (vv.12 – 32).

The chapter concludes with a means of diagnosing and cleansing the mildew. Unlike 13:47 – 59, which considered clothing, 14:33 – 57 describes the diagnosis and cleansing of houses and buildings that have the fungus growing in their walls. It may be that the reason for the separation of these two sections on mildew and their particular placement reflect the nature of the diagnosis and cleaning. With the clothing the focus was on the diagnosis, as was true of the skin diseases of ch. 13. The cleaning involved destroying the infected patch by burning it. With buildings the diagnosis is similar, but the cleaning is more detailed as to how much of the structure is to be dismantled and where the unclean materials are taken. The building is not burned.

Insofar as these infections symbolize sin and death, the cleaning of the person — especially with the sacrifice of animals and the application of the blood directly on the person involved — suggests the need of blood for life and reconciliation and forms the background to the sacrifice of Christ in the NT (Heb 9:22 et passim). Further, the use of the animals (especially two, where one is sacrificed and the other is released out of the camp) anticipates the Day of Atonement ceremony in Leviticus 16.

1. Introduction (14:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"These are the regulations for the diseased person . ..

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a Chapters 11 – 15 each begin with a similar formula of "The LORD said to Moses." This alternates with "The LORD said to Moses and Aaron." The first part of v.2 announces the subject of most of the chapter. Note that neither this chapter nor ch. 13 describes any means for healing. Instead, ch. 14 considers the dangerous effect of the uncleanness on the community and the means by which something formerly unclean and now healed can achieve full acceptance in the community.

2. Cleaning of the Person with Skin Disease (14:2b – 20)

[2]"These are the regulations for the diseased person at the time of his ceremonial cleansing, when he is brought to the priest: [3]The priest is to go outside the camp and examine him. If the person has been healed of his infectious skin disease, [4]the priest shall order that two live clean birds and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop be brought for the one to be cleansed. [5]Then the priest shall order that one of the birds be killed over fresh water in a clay pot. [6]He is then to take the live bird and dip it, together with the cedar wood, the scarlet yarn and the hyssop, into the blood of the

bird that was killed over the fresh water. [7]Seven times he shall sprinkle the one to be cleansed of the infectious disease and pronounce him clean. Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields.

[8]“The person to be cleansed must wash his clothes, shave off all his hair and bathe with water; then he will be ceremonially clean. After this he may come into the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for seven days. [9]On the seventh day he must shave off all his hair; he must shave his head, his beard, his eyebrows and the rest of his hair. He must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water, and he will be clean.

[10]“On the eighth day he must bring two male lambs and one ewe lamb a year old, each without defect, along with three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, and one log of oil. [11]The priest who pronounces him clean shall present both the one to be cleansed and his offerings before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.

[12]“Then the priest is to take one of the male lambs and offer it as a guilt offering, along with the log of oil; he shall wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. [13]He is to slaughter the lamb in the holy place where the sin offering and the burnt offering are slaughtered. Like the sin offering, the guilt offering belongs to the priest; it is most holy. [14]The priest is to 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, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [15]The priest shall then take some of the log of oil, pour it in the palm of his own left hand, [16]dip his right forefinger into the oil in his palm, and with his finger sprinkle some of it before the LORD seven times. [17]The priest is to put some of the oil remaining in his palm on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot, on top of the blood of the guilt offering. [18]The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed and make atonement for him before the LORD.

[19]“Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one to be cleansed from his uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering [20]and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, and make atonement for him, and he will be clean.

2b – 7 Since the unclean person has been so defined and because the sanctuary is holy and cannot tolerate that which is unclean, it is necessary for the priest to go outside the community to examine the person identified as

possessing an unclean disease. Verse 3 describes this meeting “outside the camp,” v.8 moves the person “into the camp,” and v.11 describes the ceremony at the Tent of Meeting. There is a spatial movement from the realm of sin and death to that of divine life and acceptance (see comment on 16:21; Gorman, 162).

The priest takes several items: “two live clean birds, some cedar wood, scarlet yarn, and hyssop.” The use of two birds in a sacrifice in Leviticus occurs here for the first time, though the use of pigeons or doves occurs repeatedly in contexts of uncleanness (5:7; 14:22; 15:14, 29; Nu 6:10). But the term “bird” (*ṣippôr,* GK 7606) designated one of the animals Abram used for the covenant with God (Ge 15:10). The use of two and the manner in which they are used anticipate the two goats on the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16. As explained there, the one set free is a scapegoat that makes atonement, while the one sacrificed serves as a purification offering.

“Cedar wood” (*ʿēṣ ʾerez,* GK 6770, 780) is mentioned here for the first time. It is dipped into the blood of the slaughtered bird, but it is not mentioned again. In the ancient Near East, cedar sometimes had cultic uses as a means of providing a pleasant, cleansing odor. This was always important for animal sacrifices. In the OT cedar symbolizes the most valuable of woods. It is used to build the palaces and temple in Jerusalem (2Sa 5:11; 7:2, 7; 1Ki 5:6, 8, 10; 6:9, 10, 15 – 16, 18, 20, 36; 7:2 – 3, 7, 11 – 12; 9:11; 1Ch 14:1). Thus its pleasant odor and its special status serve as a symbol of that which cleanses and is clean.

The use of “scarlet yarn” occurs only once outside Leviticus 14, viz., in connection with the cleaning ceremony of the red heifer’s ashes in Numbers 19:6. There it also appears with cedar wood and hyssop.

The Passover ceremony also used “hyssop” and dipped it in the blood of the slaughtered lamb (Ex 12:22). The main occurrences of the herb are in Leviticus 14 and Numbers 19. It also occurs in Ps 51:7, where the author requests God to use hyssop to purge sin away (51:7). Thus its value for cleanness and its symbol of forgiveness for sins are known in other biblical contexts.

Of special interest is 1 Kings 4:33, where the wisdom of Solomon is praised: “He described plant life, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out

of walls." Thus, another reason for the use of cedar and hyssop may be suggested. Perhaps the mention of these two plants forms a merism indicating the totality of plant life. All plant life is symbolized with these two forms. Thus the entire plant kingdom is involved in this purging. But this is not as likely. If it were the case, one would expect to see the cedar and the hyssop mentioned together, not separated by the scarlet yarn. In other words, it is better to regard the hyssop as another example of something that purges and cleans.

The sprinkling of blood again uses seven acts. It appears to signify a complete cleaning, with no uncleanness remaining.

8 – 9 The response of the person to be declared clean occurs. There is a seven-day waiting period outside the individual's home. This parallels the same waiting period during the ordination of the priests (8:33). The individuals to be declared clean must also wash their clothes, shave all their hair, and bathe. In 8:6 Moses also washes the priests, perhaps both their clothes and bodies, as part of their presentation as clean and prepared for their consecration. In addition, 6:27 – 28 recalls the washing of clothes as part of the process of cleaning anything that touches the blood of the purification offering.

Though the shaving has appeared earlier in the diagnosis of sores on the scalp (13:33), it is best understood as a means of establishing the formerly diseased person as completely clean of every mark and hair on the body. (Olyan, 620, notes both purification and preparation to offer sacrifice again as results of the shaving.)

10 – 20 The cleaning procedure involves a purification offering, a burnt offering, a guilt offering, and a grain offering. The purification offering purifies the sanctuary and the holy place of the uncleanness created by the disease. The burnt offering rededicates the healed person to the ser vice of God within the holy community. The guilt offering may repair the offense to God's holiness implied by the loss of appropriate offerings from the person while he or she was unclean and unable to approach the sanctuary (Wenham, 210). The grain offering symbolizes a gracious attitude and a prayer to remember the person for good.

The use of multiple offerings resembles the ordination of the priests as well (9:2 – 4).The same is true of the placement of blood on the person's right

earlobe, right thumb, and right big toe (8:22 – 24). The addition of oil in the anointing process is not surprising. Oil is the normal substance used in anointing. This is true elsewhere in the Bible as well as in contemporary extrabiblical practice (Hess, “The Image of the Messiah”).

The use of blood here and in Leviticus 8 arouses greater surprise, though this is also not unknown. In the case of both the ordination of the priests and the reckoning of diseased persons as clean of their ailment, there is a change in status in which the offerings and other ceremonies make possible a closer relationship with God. This is true whether the formerly diseased person now can join the worshiping community or whether Aaron and his sons could now enter the holy places of God’s sanctuary. The various offerings for atonement cover the various inadvertent sins that an Israelite could commit (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 858).

This process results in the conclusion, “and he will be clean.” This phrase in Hebrew is a single word preceded by a conjunction, *wᵉṭāhēr* (occurring in vv.8, 9, and 20). This threefold pronouncement is neither accidental nor “tangible evidence that different ceremonies were fused together over the course of time” (Gerstenberger, 175); rather, it describes the full perfection of the cleanness that the ceremony achieves.

The use of threefold occurrences in ceremonies appears in the Bible where it emphasizes the completion and perfection of obedience: the three feasts each year that require attendance (Ex 23:14, 17; 34:23 – 24); Balaam’s threefold blessing on Israel (Nu 24:10); David’s threefold bow before his friend (1Sa 20:41); Solomon’s offerings three times each year (1Ki 9:25); and Elijah’s threefold stretching of himself across the child brought back from the dead (1Ki 17:21). There is also the larger rhetorical and literary usage of threefold repetition in poetry and literature to drive home important points (R. S.

Hess, “Hebrew Psalms and Amarna Correspondence from Jerusalem: Some Comparisons and Implications,” *ZAW* 101 [1989]: 259 – 61).The purification ceremony, if followed in faith and obedience, results in the complete cleansing of the person from the disease.

NOTES

2 – 20 For Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 832 – 59), the rituals described in this passage are best understood as originally ones of the curse of disease, purification from sin, and exorcism from demonic forces, from which the later writers of the Bible removed the magical component and attributed the healing process entirely to God. They remained in the Bible because they were too strongly embedded in popular belief and tradition.

This hypothesis may or may not reflect the origins of these rituals. For example, the experience of Naaman, when Elisha told him to bathe in the river, was one of purification (2Ki 5:10). Thus there is evidence for purification as the purpose of some of the ceremonies described here. But exorcism does not appear to form a part of the ceremony as preserved in ancient Israel, nor is there evidence in Israel that these rites provided a cure for the disease. Milgrom (e.g., *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 838) may be correct in observing that the purpose of these rites was transformed in the light of the theology of Israel.

4 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 832 – 33) translates the word "live" (*ḥayyôt*, GK 2645) as "wild." The fact that the birds are alive is obvious. The nature of the bird as wild is essential so that the one released will not return and bring back the impurity it took away. Along with the living waters and the blood as the symbol of life, these items form a powerful combination that symbolize life over against the symbolic death of the scale disease (see ibid., 889).

10, **12**, **15** The unit of a log (*log*m, GK 4253) is found only in this context. Susan Rattray (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 898) identifies it as about one cup.

12 – 32 Verses 12 – 20 and 21 – 32 each form an elaborate chiasm. Verses 16 and 27, describing the priestly dipping and sprinkling of oil, form the center of each chiasm (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 846 – 47, 859 – 60).

3. Cleaning of a Poor Person with Skin Disease (14:21 – 32)

[21]"If, however, he is poor and cannot afford these, he must take one male

lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for him, together with a tenth of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil for a grain offering, a log of oil, [22]and two doves or two young pigeons, which he can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

[23]"On the eighth day he must bring them for his cleansing to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, before the LORD. [24]The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering, together with the log of oil, and wave them before the LORD as a wave offering. 25He shall slaughter the lamb for the guilt offering and take some of its blood and put it on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [26]The priest is to pour some of the oil into the palm of his own left hand, [27]and with his right forefinger sprinkle some of the oil from his palm seven times before the LORD. [28]Some of the oil in his palm he is to put on the same places he put the blood of the guilt offering — on the lobe of the right ear of the one to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand and on the big toe of his right foot. [29]The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one to be cleansed, to make atonement for him before the LORD. [30]Then he shall sacrifice the doves or the young pigeons, which the person can afford, [31]one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering, together with the grain offering. In this way the priest will make atonement before the LORD on behalf of the one to be cleansed."

[32]These are the regulations for anyone who has an infectious skin disease and who cannot afford the regular offerings for his cleansing.

COMMENTARY

21 - 32 A poor individual may substitute two doves or pigeons for the one male lamb and ewe lamb used for the purification offering and the burnt offering. It is necessary for even a poor person to present one of the male lambs for the guiltoffering. In the other details, the offerings closely follow the procedures already given for the cleaning in vv.2b – 20.

Interestingly, vv.21 and 32 form an inclusio for the whole text that allows offerings for one who "is poor and cannot afford" the regular offerings. This emphasizes the concern of the sacrificial texts for the poor, just as the later legal

texts of Leviticus 17 – 26 will reflect a similar value. The importance of this remains in the NT, in which concern for meeting the spiritual needs of the poor ranks high on the list of priorities of Jesus and his disciples (Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 6:20; 7:22; Ro 15:26; Jas 2:5 – 6).

4. Diagnosis and Treatment of Mildew in Buildings (14:33 – 53)

[33]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [34]"When you enter the land of Canaan, which I am giving you as your possession, and I put a spreading mildew in a house in that land, [35]the owner of the house must go and tell the priest, 'I have seen something that looks like mildew in my house.' [36]The priest is to order the house to be emptied before he goes in to examine the mildew, so that nothing in the house will be pronounced unclean. After this the priest is to go in and inspect the house. [37]He is to examine the mildew on the walls, and if it has greenish or reddish depressions that appear to be deeper than the surface of the wall, [38]the priest shall go out the doorway of the house and close it up for seven days. [39]On the seventh day the priest shall return to inspect the house. If the mildew has spread on the walls, [40]he is to order that the contaminated stones be torn out and thrown into an unclean place outside the town. [41]He must have all the inside walls of the house scraped and the material that is scraped off dumped into an unclean place outside the town. [42]Then they are to take other stones to replace these and take new clay and plaster the house.

[43]"If the mildew reappears in the house after the stones have been torn out and the house scraped and plastered, [44]the priest is to go and examine it and, if the mildew has spread in the house, it is a destructive mildew; the house is unclean. [45]It must be torn down — its stones, timbers and all the plaster — and taken out of the town to an unclean place.

[46]"Anyone who goes into the house while it is closed up will be unclean till evening. [47]Anyone who sleeps or eats in the house must wash his clothes.

[48]"But if the priest comes to examine it and the mildew has not spread after the house has been plastered, he shall pronounce the house clean, because the mildew is gone. [49]To purify the house he is to take two birds

and some cedar wood, scarlet yarn and hyssop. [50]He shall kill one of the birds over fresh water in a clay pot. [51]Then he is to take the cedar wood, the hyssop, the scarlet yarn and the live bird, dip them into the blood of the dead bird and the fresh water, and sprinkle the house seven times. [52]He shall purify the house with the bird's blood, the fresh water, the live bird, the cedar wood, the hyssop and the scarlet yarn. [53]Then he is to release the live bird in the open fields outside the town. In this way he will make atonement for the house, and it will be clean."

COMMENTARY

33 – 47 This text describes mildew and other fungi infecting the stones in the walls of a house. The concern for purity, manifest in the wholeness of the tabernacle and its ceremonies as well as the wholeness of the physical body, carries over to the wholeness of clothes (13:47 – 59) and the wholeness of a house. As with the person and the clothes, this does not suggest that the house is responsible for the disease; but it does require dealing with any such physically observable change, whether on skin, on the surface of clothing, or on the walls of a house. In every case such disease cannot live in the holy community. It must be removed and taken outside.

This is no less true with the house where mildew emerges. Both the stones with the mildew and the plaster in the house must be removed and thrown outside the village in an unclean place. The examination by the priest as well as the process, involving an initial observation, a seven-day quarantine, and a second examination, resemble the same process as the skin-diseased person and the mildew-infected clothing of ch. 13. Of course, here the offending stones can be ripped from the wall and placed away from everyone.

The diagnosis of 14:33 – 47 corresponds to the diagnosis of the skin diseases (13:1 – 32). As with many of the skin diseases, the question of the depth of the infection becomes important (cf. 13:4, 25, 30 – 34). If it is just a surface infection, it has not spread and the house can be saved. But if the infection has spread during the incubation period, the priest must order the house and all its contents to be pulled down and cast into an unclean place outside the town. The procedure demonstrates how much effort was taken to preserve the house

(Hartley, 199).

48 – 53 The cleaning of an uninfected house corresponds to the cleaning of a person no longer having the skin disease, as detailed in the first part of ch. 14. The priest uses the same materials and follows a similar procedure. In this case he sprinkles the blood on the house rather than on the clean person. Note that v.53 observes how the priest has made atonement for the house so that it is clean. Again the idea of atonement (*kipper*m, GK 4105) is not concerned exclusively with the forgiveness of sin — something that cannot be ascribed to the house — but with the rendering of the previously "diseased house" into a state of wholeness so that it can remain in the midst of the holy community of God and be used for occupation.

NOTES

33 – 53 Babylonian and Assyrian practices regarding mold discovered in a house contrast with the picture of Leviticus. The Mesopotamian fungus is an omen of evil, with the nature of that omen determined by its location on the building and its color. The householder must therefore be purified through a washing ceremony. Israel's lack of belief in omens allows for a practical solution directed toward the mold itself (Piers T. Crocker, "Archaeology, Mildew, and Leviticus 14," *Buried History* 26, no. 1 [1990]: 3 – 11; Sam Meier, "House Fungus: Mesopotamia and Israel (Lev 14:33 – 53)," *RB* 96 [1989]: 184 – 92).

49 – 52 Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 881) identifies the items repeated in these verses as "indispensable in the purificatory rite: the blood as the purgative; the spring water to give the blood volume; the live blood to carry off the impurity; the cedar wood as additional 'blood' [because of its red color]; the hyssop as the sprinkling instrument; and the crimson thread as additional 'blood.' "

REFLECTION

Though the noble stones of the temple receive mention in the NT (Mk 13:1; Lk 21:5), such admiration does not come from Jesus. But it may in part be the

purity of the stones that built the villages of Israel, such as Leviticus 14:33 – 53 mentions, that orms the background to Peter's exhortation calling Christians to be "like living stones . . . being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1Pe 2:5).

5. Summary and Conclusion of Skin Diseases (14:54 – 57)

> 54These are the regulations for any infectious skin disease, for an itch,
> 55for mildew in clothing or in a house, 56and for a swelling, a rash or a
> bright spot, 57to determine when something is clean or unclean.
> These are the regulations for infectious skin diseases and mildew.

COMMENTARY

54 – 57 These verses conclude the two chapters that address manifest infections in a person, clothing, and houses. This review of these areas serves to signal the end of the discussion and to emphasize that everything relevant to issues of cleanness in these matters has now been considered. The description of infections in garments and houses was considered in 13:47 – 59 and 14:33 – 53. The use of the threefold description of skin infections in v.56 ("a swelling, a rash or a bright spot") recalls the same description at the beginning of the discussion in 13:2. It thus forms an inclusio for all the material in the two chapters.

Furthermore, the common word *tôrâ* (GK 9368), here translated as "regulations," has already occurred three times in these two chapters (13:59; 14:2, 32), both at summaries and at introductions to the legislation. Here it occurs twice (vv.54 and 57), again tying the whole summary together by appearing in its first and last verses. In addition the same root (*yrh*, GK 3723) forms the basis for the verb "to determine" (*lᵉhôrōt*) in the last verse. Thereby the author reveals the true nature of these chapters and the "regulations." It is "to determine" or to discover the uncleanness and to understand what recognizes it as clean.

E. Cleanness from Bodily Discharges (15:1 – 33)

OVERVIEW

This is the last chapter dealing with the issue of uncleanness. After considering unclean animals (ch. 11), the section turned to uncleanness at birth (ch. 12) and external manifestations of uncleanness on the outside of the body as well as on the clothing and homes of people (chs. 13 – 14). Now the focus shifts to the interior of the person, examining uncleanness from within. Thus there is a general direction from outside the person to the interior.

Leviticus 12 does not violate this pattern because the uncleanness discussed there is directly related to the type of baby born, male or female. The uncleanness derives from the new life that comes into the world, nor from some interior discharge as in ch. 15. At the same time, the uncleanness in both chs. 12 and 15 is related to what comes from the genital areas; therefore, these two chapters do form an inclu-sio to the section on uncleanness that affects people.

Two frequent and therefore key words occur. One is "discharge," from the Hebrew root *zwb* (GK 2307; R. S. Hess, "2307 זוב," *NIDOTTE* , 1:1086 – 88). Of the fifty-five occurrences of this root in the Bible, it is found twenty-six times in Leviticus 15, both as a noun and as a verb (translated as "flowing"). Elsewhere it commonly describes Canaan as a land flowing with milk and honey (twenty times, beginning with Ex 3:8).

The most disputed aspect of this term's use in ch. 15 concerns what the discharge refers to in a man. It is clear that it cannot be ejaculation (addressed in vv.16 – 18), but it seems related to the genitalia, as is clear from the discussion of the discharge of women (vv.19 – 30). Thus it may be either a sexually transmitted disease, such as gonorrhea or a parasitical infection of the urinary tract producing hematuria and "stones." The latter is more likely because of the absence of *gonorrhea virulenta* in the ancient Near East (J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "Medicine in the Land and Times of the Old Testament," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. T. Ishida [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1982], 357 – 58). Thus it may be related to bihharzia or schistosomiasis, still known in the Middle East.

A second key word is “bathe” (*rāḥaṣ*, GK 8175), which occurs twelve times in this chapter, usually in the phrase: “(he shall launder his clothes) and wash in waters and remain unclean until evening” (vv.5 – 8, 10 – 11, 13, 16, 18, 21 – 22, 27).The seventh occurrence adds the term “living” (*ḥayyim*, GK 2645) to describe the waters. This occurs several times in ch. 14 but only here in ch. 15 and describes the water as fresh. Verse 13 also changes the second part of the phrase to “and he shall be clean,” denoting physical rather than ritual purity (Warning, 107).

After an initial introduction (v.1 – 2a) the chapter considers men (vv.2b – 17), sex (v.18), and women (vv.19 – 30), and it concludes with a summary statement (vv.31 – 33). Within each section about men and women are two parts: those dealing with chronic diseases (vv.2b – 15, 25 – 30) and those concerning regular events in the course of life (vv.16 – 24). Together these form a chiasm: men’s chronic diseases (vv.2b – 15), men’s semen emission (vv.16 – 17), women’s menstrual period (vv.19 – 24), women’s chronic diseases (vv.25 – 30; Harrison, 159). A larger chiasm is noted by R. Péter-Contesse (*Lévitique 1 – 16* [Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1993], 232; Warning, 106 – 7):

A Introduction (vv.1 – 2a)
B Sexual infection of a man (vv.2b – 12)
Purification of the healed man (vv.13 – 15)
C Seminal discharges of a man (vv.16 – 17)
D Conjugal sexual relations (v.18)
C’ Menses of a woman (vv.19 – 24)
B’ Abnormal (infectious?) menses of a woman (vv.25 – 27)
Purification of a woman after her menses (vv.28 – 30)
A’ Conclusion (vv.31 – 33)

None of these conditions are sinful, but all render the people unclean and anything or anyone they touch as unclean. A ceremony is prescribed for a return to cleanness. It is the same for both men and women. As with the other ceremonies of cleanness, these involve a week of waiting, washing clothes and bathing oneself, the use of two birds, and the offering of a sin and a burnt offering.

1. Introduction (15:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses and Aaron, [2]“Speak to the Israelites and say to them:

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a For the use of this fomulaic introduction on 11:1 – 2a.
in the chapters concerning cleanness, see comment

2. Male Chronic Emission (15:2b – 15)

[2]“Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘When any man has a bodily discharge, the discharge is unclean. [3]Whether it continues flowing from his body or is blocked, it will make him unclean. This is how his discharge will bring about uncleanness:

[4]“ ‘Any bed the man with a discharge lies on will be unclean, and anything he sits on will be unclean. [5]Anyone who touches his bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. [6]Whoever sits on anything that the man with a discharge sat on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[7]“ ‘Whoever touches the man who has a discharge must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[8]“ ‘If the man with the discharge spits on someone who is clean, that person must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[9]“ ‘Everything the man sits on when riding will be unclean, [10]and whoever touches any of the things that were under him will be unclean till evening; whoever picks up those things must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[11]“ ‘Anyone the man with a discharge touches without rinsing his hands with water must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening.

[12]“ ‘A clay pot that the man touches must be broken, and any wooden article is to be rinsed with water.

[13]“ ‘When a man is cleansed from his discharge, he is to count off seven

days for his ceremonial cleansing; he must wash his clothes and bathe himself with fresh water, and he will be clean. [14]On the eighth day he must take two doves or two young pigeons and come before the Lord to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and give them to the priest. [15]The priest is to sacrifice them, the one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make atonement before the Lord for the man because of his discharge.

COMMENTARY

2 – 3 The nature of the disease described by this flow is probably a genital one. The common words "body, bodily" (*bāśār*, GK 1414) occur in vv.2 and 19 to introduce the discharges of both the man and the woman. This word certainly concerns the genitalia here. Not only does this conclusion agree with the rest of the chapter regarding genital matters, but it also follows the way in which the uncleanness is communicated, viz., by means of sitting or lying.

That blood does not appear in the description of the ailment suggests the absence of any problem related to hemorrhoids or similar maladies. As described, the disease envisioned probably includes something other than traditional gonorrhea, despite the assumptions made by most commentators. Further, the fact that it can run or coagulate suggests either different diseases or different stages to the disease.

4 – 12 The emission spreads its uncleanness to anything the man touches. All objects become unclean, and anyone who touches them becomes unclean. The remedy for this is to wash one's clothes and bathe with water, after which one remains unclean until the evening. Harrison is surely correct in observing that these regulations would provide good prevention against any infection. Even the regulation regarding spitting (v.8) reflects concerns that match modern preventative measures (Harrison, 161 – 62).

While such measures reflect a view of illness different from the common ancient Near Eastern attribution to demons, the association of washing and bathing with ritual purification was not limited to Israel. Furthermore, the famous palace at Knossos in Crete, dating from the middle of the second

millennium BC, also reveals a sophisticated use of water in drainage systems for human waste that was not again seen in Europe until the nineteenth century AD. The degree to which Israel and other contemporary cultures were aware of such practices and their hygienic effects cannot be determined. But the presence of a degree of knowledge about purification and cleanliness cannot be dismissed without more evidence than is presently available.

13 – 15 The text does not primarily address health. It is concerned with cleanness before the Lord. This attribute is achieved not only by wholeness of body but also by a ceremony in which the priest restores the whole person from the previously declared uncleanness to a state of full fellowship with the worshiping community of Israel and with God.

The seven-day period of waiting after the healing of a flow corresponds to similar periods for each of the cleansing ceremonies described in the preceding three chapters. The time allows for a confirmation that the flow has stopped. The cheap offering of two birds reflects the concern that the cleansing ceremony be the same for rich and poor in this matter of a discharge. The purification offering provides a purification of the man so that no impurities keep him from becoming part of the community again. The burnt offering expresses a rededication of one's whole self, newly made whole, to the ser vice of the Lord. The resulting atonement renders the person again able to worship God.

NOTES

2 – 3 The disease is not *gonorrhea virulenta*, which was unknown before the fifteenth century AD, but possibly *blennorrhea urethrae*, or urinary bilharzia. But no single disease is envisioned here — rather, any that produce these symptoms (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 907).

3 The term "body" (often "flesh," (*bāśār*, GK 1414) may here be rendered "member" with reference to the penis (NRSV; Budd, 215).

5 It may be that the note regarding priestly undergarments (Ex 28:43) suggests that undergarments were not worn and therefore genital flow would be more

likely to contaminate objects (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 911).

11 Levine, 95, understands the contact here as the impure person's touching the other with his hands.

3. Male Emission of Semen (15:16 – 17)

> [16]" 'When a man has an emission of semen, he must bathe his whole body with water, and he will be unclean till evening. [17]Any clothing or leather that has semen on it must be washed with water, and it will be unclean till evening.

COMMENTARY

16 – 17 These verses provide for the emission of semen in terms of the uncleanness that it causes. It is necessary to wash anything the semen touches and to bathe in water. In the case of intercourse, the uncleanness is based on the possibility that the act may not result in a child and thus the seed may be wasted, as in nocturnal emissions (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16* , 934).Wasted emissions intended for life, rather than weakness after sex (G. J. Wenham, "Why Does Sexual Intercourse Defile (Lev 15 18)?" *ZAW* 95 [1983]: 432 – 34) or the second function of the penis as a disposer of human waste (Richard Whitekettle, "Leviticus 15.18 Reconsidered:

Chiasm, Spatial Structure and the Body," *JSOT* 49 [1991]: 31 – 45; Hartley, *Leviticus*, 211), explain the uncleanness (Philip P. Jenson, *Graded Holiness:A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World* [JSOTSup 106. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992], 75 – 88). Clearly such uncleanness must have separated sexual activities from any and every ceremony and act of legitimate worship of God at the sanctuary. In fact, the designation of sexual intercourse as a source of cultic impurity is common throughout the ancient world. Normally, bathing is prescribed for cleanness. The Bible is unique in its additional command to wait until the evening for the complete elimination of the impurity. Furthermore, there is never any indication in the Bible that the water for washing has some magical power of its own. Though this is a common understanding in other societies, in

the Bible any purificatory power to water comes as a result of God's will (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 963).

4. Sexual Relations (15:18)

[18]When a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

COMMENTARY

18 This verse deals with sexual intercourse within marriage. The text preceding it addresses men's uncleanness, while that which follows concerns female uncleanness. It thus forms a literary hinge that connects these two parts of the chapter (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 905, 930 – 31).

NOTES

16, **18** The uncleanness of male emissions separates sexual practices from the worship of Israel's God. For examples of this problem in neighboring religions, see especially Proverbs 7 and Hosea 4:10 – 14. Recent bold assertions that sex played no part in the worship of various deities and that prostitution associated with the cult centers was purely for financial gain and completely desacralized (Karel Van der Toorn, "Female,"193 – 205; idem, *From Her Cradle*, 93 – 110) do not take into account all the available extrabiblical textual evidence that does provide examples of sex as part of the worship of various deities (Lambert, 127 – 57). In contrast, the uncleanness of male emissions, even during sexual relations with one's wife, excluded this activity from the sanctuary (Levine, 96).

5. Female Menstrual Period (15:19 – 24)

[19]" 'When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be

unclean till evening.

20“ ‘Anything she lies on during her period will be unclean, and anything she sits on will be unclean. 21Whoever touches her bed must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 22Whoever touches anything she sits on must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be unclean till evening. 23Whether it is the bed or anything she was sitting on, when anyone touches it, he will be unclean till evening.

24“ ‘If a man lies with her and her monthly flow touches him, he will be unclean for seven days; any bed he lies on will be unclean.

COMMENTARY

19 – 24 This passage turns to consider women and the uncleanness that comes as a result of their monthly flow of blood. The structure of the text provides a neat transition with the discussion on uncleanness generated by sexual intercourse in v.18 as affecting both the man and the woman involved. The reference to uncleanness of the man and the woman and sexual intercourse occurs again in v.24. Thus this provides an inclusio and reflects the central focus of the entire chapter: the discharges from the organs of reproductivity in both sexes.

The uncleanness generated by a woman’s menstrual period results in seven days during which no man can approach her, nor can anyone touch her without becoming unclean. This uncleanness would not have been as frequent in a society in which women married at a young age, had many pregnancies, and did not live as long as they do today. More importantly, this sort of restriction reduced the demand a man could place on his partner. In the end, the woman was not simply chattel to be owned and used by her husband but potentially more of an independent person able to define her own course of action. There are no parallels to these laws in the ancient Near East.

NOTES

18, **24** The more severe punishment for lying with a woman during her

menstrual period is recorded in v.18. The reason for the difference is probably related to the intent — in v.18 the man intentionally lies with a woman despite his knowledge of the circumstances, whereas in v.24 he is ignorant of her condition (Keil, 394;Wenham, 220; Hartley, 212).

19 – 23 Magonet, 149, notes that several conditions do not explicitly require bathing. He posits later insertions of requirements for laundering and bathing with respect to the woman. But note the twelvefold occurrence of the verb "to bathe" in this chapter, as already discussed. This seems intentional and an integral part of the text's structure.

19 Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22,* 1811) identifies the week of uncleanness each month as the primary practical reason for the exclusion of women from the priesthood.

6. Female Chronic Diseases (15:25 – 30)

> 25“ ‘When a woman has a discharge of blood for many days at a time
> other than her monthly period or has a discharge that continues beyond her
> period, she will be unclean as long as she has the discharge, just as in the
> days of her period. 26Any bed she lies on while her discharge continues will
> be unclean, as is her bed during her monthly period, and anything she sits
> on will be unclean, as during her period. 27Whoever touches them will be
> unclean; he must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be
> unclean till evening.
> 28“ ‘When she is cleansed from her discharge, she must count off seven
> days, and after that she will be ceremonially clean. 29On the eighth day she
> must take two doves or two young pigeons and bring them to the priest at
> the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 30The priest is to sacrifice one for a sin
> offering and the other for a burnt offering. In this way he will make
> atonement for her before the Lord for the uncleanness of her discharge.

COMMENTARY

25 – 30 The description of the chronic bleeding diseases of women follows

the same pattern as the chronic diseases of men: the uncleanness of her disease and how it affects what she lies on (vv.25 – 27), and the cleanness of her discharge, which involves the same cleansing procedure as that of the man (cf. vv.13 – 15 to vv.28 – 30).

The difference between the texts about chronic diseases of men and of women concerns the details of what becomes unclean as a result of touching different objects and other people coming into contact with the uncleanness. The discussion for the man is far more detailed. This follows the tendency in biblical law to present the fully detailed description first and then to schematize in summary form when the issue occurs again (Hartley, 206). This is further supported by the specifics that are mentioned for the uncleanness of women. Verses 25 – 27 repeat the first laws of the uncleanness of men (vv.4 – 6). This allows these verses to function as a summary that implicitly includes the remainder of the text (vv.7 – 12).

This uncleanness brings to mind the situation of the unclean woman who in Mark 5:24 – 34 (Mt 9:20 – 22; Lk 8:43 – 48) touches the clothing of Jesus despite her flow of blood. Jesus does not rebuke her or even mention her uncleanness; rather, he pronounces her healed and marvels at her faith. It is not clear that this text abolishes the laws of purification. If Jesus is truly the sacrifice for the sins of the world, then his acceptance of this uncleanness in his own body would be part of taking upon himself the suffering and sin of the world and redeeming it. There is no abolition of the law with Jesus (Mt 5:17). But the Christian story suggests that, for Jesus, faith in him as Lord and Savior is the starting point for healing and a life of discipleship. Jesus thus reverses the effects of sin and uncleanness.

7. Summary (15:31 – 33)

31“ ‘You must keep the Israelites separate from things that make them unclean, so they will not die in their uncleanness for defiling my dwelling place, which is among them.’ ”

32These are the regulations for a man with a discharge, for anyone made unclean by an emission of semen, 33for a woman in her monthly period, for a man or a woman with a discharge, and for a man who lies with a woman

who is ceremonially unclean.

COMMENTARY

31 This provides a summary to the entire uncleanness section in chs. 12 – 15. The reference to the tabernacle or "dwelling place" (*miškān*, GK 5438) occurs here for the second time in Leviticus (cf. 8:10, where Moses began the process of anointing the priests by anointing the tabernacle). This reference connects the beginning of the process of purifying the priests with the conclusion of the discussion of purification laws. God's holiness requires the separation of what is unclean from what is acceptable to God; it reflects wholeness in the physical world, whether animals or people. The physical wholeness of people in this world symbolizes the holiness of God. Israel in its life, its diet, its reproduction, and the bodies of its people are called to manifest this holiness.

32 – 33 These verses summarize Leviticus 15. They parallel the other summaries in this section of uncleanness in Leviticus: 11:46 – 47 for animals, 12:8b for childbirth, 13:59 for mildew in clothing, 14:32 for skin diseases, 14:54 – 57 for skin diseases and various forms of mildew, 15:32 – 33 for discharges of men and women.

IV. THE DAY OF ATONEMENT (16:1 – 34)

OVERVIEW

The ritual of forgiveness of sin on the Day of Atonement is the first repeated sacrificial ritual that is described for the benefit of all the people. Leviticus 1 – 7 provided a detailed guide for the variety of offerings and their composition, performance, and significance. These were then applied in chs. 8ff. In fact, Leviticus 8 – 9 created the priesthood and installed the priests so that they could perform the ceremonies of the sacrifices. Leviticus 10 warned of the consequences of carelessness in approaching God. Chapters 11 – 15 reviewed the major issues of food, birth, skin disease, death, mildew, and genital excretions that prohibited people from taking their place in the ceremony of the forgiveness of sins. All of this anticipates Leviticus 16, where the tabernacle, sacrifices, and priesthood —properly constructed, performed, and ordained — provide a fully integrated ceremony to guide the people in understanding the awful consequences of sin and the meaning of atonement for that sin.

The whole ceremony is structured in a chiastic form with an approach to God in the Most Holy Place and then a departure from that presence. Both the beginning and end of the description express the importance of this ceremony as incumbent on God's people through his direct command. The preparation of the priest (vv.2b – 5), with details about his clothing and the ongoing concern for the animals to be sacrificed (vv.6 – 10), correspond to the return from God's presence (vv.23 – 28), which again focuses on the priestly vestments and the disposal of the remains of the animal sacrifices. The priest's purification offering followed by Israel's purification offering, and the atonement of the Most Holy Place followed by the atonement for Israel (vv.11 – 19), form the focus of the ceremony in an A – B – A' – B' structure.

This reminds the reader of biblical parallelism found in poetry and narrative. There, as here, it emphasizes the importance of the items discussed by repeating them. The priest's sins are atoned for before he can represent Israel for the same purpose. The Holy Place is purified before God accepts the sacrifice for Israel's

atonement. The high priest represents Israel, so his approach to God in the Holy Place also symbolizes the approach of all Israel into that place. Similarly, Christ represented all Christians in their atonement and appearance before God after he demonstrated the perfection of his life (and thus did not require that a purification offering be given for himself; Heb 4:14 – 16; 10:19 – 22).

The use of animals in the sending away of impurities occurs in Mesopotamia and among the Hittites and Hurrians (Wright, 15 – 74). The officiants take or send the animal to a wilderness place and there give it to a deity as a substitute or for appeasement. This part does not occur in the Bible. Various animals are involved, and in Mesopotamia they are often killed. A rite from twenty-fourth-century BC Syrian Ebla, where the purification of a "mausoleum" uses two goats — one released to a wilderness and the other enclosed there — more closely resembles the Israelite practice (Zatelli, 254 – 63).

Others have found parallels with Genesis 37, in which Joseph's brothers slaughter a goat and pretend to their father that it is Joseph's blood. This ruse may symbolize the first sin of the entire nation that is repented of before Joseph (Ge 50; Calum Carmichael, "The Origin of the Scapegoat Ritual," *VT* 50 [2000]: 167 – 82). Its association with Leviticus 16 goes back to the intertestamental book of *Jubilees* and includes Maimonides among its proponents. But it does not represent the first sin of the entire nation, as Carmichael argues, because neither Joseph (the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh) nor Benjamin was included in perpetrating it. Furthermore, forgiveness was not sought from God but from Joseph. But it does provide a comparable group sin and a precedent for the use of the blood of a goat. Both this and the parallels from Ebla and elsewhere suggest a ceremony familiar to that of the Israelites.

NOTES

A. M. Rodriquez ("Leviticus 16: Its Literary Structure," *AUSS* 34 [1966]: 269 – 86) provides a detailed chiastic structure to the chapter. This and other structural observations argue against a complex compositional development over many centuries.

A. Introduction: The Words of God (16:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. [2]The LORD said to Moses . . .

COMMENTARY

1 On God's act of addressing Moses, see comments on 4:1. Verse 1 qualifies this with a note that it occurred after the death of Aaron's sons. This explicitly connects the chapter with Leviticus 10 and the events recounted there. Though chs. 11 – 15 logically precede ch. 16, they have no chronological context. Leviticus 10, with its defilement of the sanctuary and the sin of the sons of Aaron, precedes ch. 16 and demonstrates the need for a ceremony of atonement that restores fellowship between God and Israel.

2a The expression "Tell . . . Aaron" occurs previously only at 6:25, where it introduces the purification offering. But nowhere else is the term qualified by the recognition that Aaron is Moses' brother. Of course, this is well known to the reader of the Pentateuch (Ex 4:14); nevertheless, its appearance here signifies the relationship that Moses has with Aaron as a means either to distance God from Aaron, who has come close to guilt and whose sons have sinned (cf. 10:3, 16 – 20), or to identify beyond doubt whom God appointed as priest to perform this special ceremony of atonement. Regarding the former, the atonement procedure that follows becomes an important means for Aaron to restore full fellowship between God and himself. Regarding the latter, Aaron will understand his key role in what follows. In either case, the designation prepares Aaron for the ceremony of atonement.

NOTES

1 Warning, 37 – 63, observes that of the thirty-seven statements introducing divine speech in Leviticus, this is the nineteenth or central one. It is also distinct from the others in its language and form.

Nadab and Abihu polluted the sanctuary both by their sin and by the presence

of their corpses. This would require cleansing of the sanctuary — a concern addressed here (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1011). This text also serves as a warning for the high priest not to violate God's will (Hartley, 234).

Hartley, 218, identifies the following indications of the antiquity of this ritual, despite its lack of attestation outside Leviticus: elements of antiquity present in the text itself, especially in its expiation ritual; a removal of impurity ritual (sending away the goat to the wilderness) with Hittite parallels; the loss of the meaning of "Azazel"; and the mention of the "place of atonement" (= mercy seat), which does not appear in postexilic biblical texts. See additional parallels with Hittite, Hurrian, and other second-millennium sources in this commentary.

B. The Preparation of the Priest (16:2b – 5)

> [2]The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.
>
> [3]"This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. [4]He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. [5]From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

COMMENTARY

2b This verse forms a literary connection with Exodus through the terms translated "atonement" (NIV) — or, more conventionally, "mercy seat" (*kappōret*, GK 4114) — and "cloud" (*ʿānān*, GK 6727). Both terms occur here for the first time in Leviticus, and they only appear in this chapter The term *Kappōret* s better translated according to the meaning of its root (*kpr*, GK 4105), "to atone, ransom" (see discussion at 1:4). *Kappōret* s not an abstract concept but a concrete location ("place of atonement") and an object within the holiest room of the

sanctuary.

Kappōret was first described in Exodus 24:17 as part of the construction of the ark of the covenant (vv.10 – 22). There it was an object of pure gold with a length of 3.75 feet and a width of 2.25 feet (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1014). It rested on the gold-plated wooden box of the ark between the two images of the cherubim, and it was designated as the central place where God would speak to and dwell within Israel. Martin Luther translated it as "mercy seat," and that translation has remained popular until the present because it describes function. But the Hebrew term itself is better rendered "place of atonement."

Both "cloud" and "place of atonement" appeared previously in the biblical texts in Exodus 40:20 (place of atonement; NIV "atonement cover") and Exodus 40:34 – 38 ("cloud"), with reference to the place in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle and the presence of God. Indeed, *kappôret* occurs primarily in the description of the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus 25 – 31 and 35 – 40 and in Leviticus 16. Elsewhere in the OT it twice appears incidentally (Nu 7:89; 1Ch 28:11).

Thus these terms and their theological significance provide a substantial connection between the initial construction of the tabernacle and its use for this ceremony. In light of the central features and purpose of the tabernacle, the place of atonement, and the presence of God, the ceremony of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16 forms the chief purpose of its construction. It is first and foremost not a house for God or even a place for Israel to meet with God, but a structure designed to facilitate God's forgiveness of Israel's sin and his restoration of fellowship with them. For the Christian, the atonement of Jesus' death becomes this "place" of atonement (Ro 3:25).

Of all people, the priest has the greatest privilege of access to the Holy Place of the God of Israel. According to the sacrificial rituals of chs. 1 – 7 and the ordination of chs. 8 – 9, the priest comes closer to the Holy Place of God than anyone else. Nevertheless, as ch. 10 vividly demonstrated, this access is not unqualified. The priest must obey, be clean (chs. 11 – 15), and enter the Most Holy Place only at divinely chosen times. As with the priest of Israel and the ancient worship of God, so also with Christian worship there is a proper way to approach God (1Co 14:40).

3 For the young bull of the purification offering and the ram of the burnt offering, see 8:14 – 21 and their use at the ordination of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood.

4 The priestly outfit included linen garments (8:5 – 13). This second appearance suggests a special tie with the priests (4:3). Angels wore linen garments (Eze 9:2 – 3, 11), but here they define the priest stripped of all special vestments of his office as high priest. Though rightfully belonging to the priesthood, these other items did not serve the attitude of humility and self-affliction required on this day of seeking God's forgiveness. Note that linen tunics were used by Mishael and Elzaphan to carry the corpses of Nadab and Abihu after the judgment for their sin (10:5). God stipulated their preparation (Ex 28:39 – 43; cf. 39:27 – 29). Compare Philippians 2:1 – 11 and the humility of Christ in his priestly role of sacrificing himself for the sins of all people.

5 The use of a goat to represent the purification offering of the people and the ram to represent the burnt offering differs from what might be expected according to the interpretation of Leviticus 4 and 5. There the bull is brought for a purification offering when the entire community has offended God, and a female goat is sacrificed for the transgression of a citizen of Israel. Here it may be that the choice of a goat for the purification offering symbolizes Israel as a single person in the text. The use of the ram for a burnt offering, though not specified in the initial description of the burnt offering (Lev 1), does occur for Aaron and his sons at their ordination (Lev 8 – 9).

NOTES

2 For the nominal structure of the term *(kappōret,* (GK 4114), see James L. Sagarin, *Hebrew Noun Patterns (Mishqalim)*: *Morphology, Semantics, and Lexicon* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 45 – 46. The other roots that form this type of noun include *baṣṣōret,*(*kappōret,* and *massōret,* as well as *pārōket*. The term *baṣṣōret,* means a period of drought, while *(kappōret,* refers to a ball. *Massōret* is postbiblical and refers to the scriptural text and other authoritative texts in Judaism. For problems with its dubious occurrence in Ezekiel 20:37, see Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel*: *Chapters 1 – 24* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 647 – 48, n.

170. In any case, all other forms of this noun pattern, especially in OT times, refer to physical realities or substances, not to abstract concepts. Thus it describes the “atonement slate” (Hartley, 235) or “place of atonement.”

In the priestly writings only this chapter refers to “the Most Holy Place” (= Holy of Holies) as “the Holy (Place)” (*haqqōdeš*, GK 7731). Elsewhere it refers to the other part of the tent sanctuary and not to the inner area (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1013). Such changes in terminology lead Hartley, 230 – 31, to posit a variety of sources and forms behind the present ch. 16 brought together by postexilic scribes from earlier Israelite sanctuaries throughout the land. But such a process assumes the unlikely scenario in which Josiah’s monotheism, which closed these sanctuaries outside Jerusalem, would have nevertheless permitted a variety of forms of this ritual to survive and to be held as sacred texts. Perhaps more accurate is the theory of a single ritual text whose origins or antecedents predated many of the other texts in the book, including pre-Israelite rituals.

4 Egyptian priests wore linen, and Hittie kings practiced their cult with a white garment (Itamar Singer, *The Hittite KI.LAM Festival*, 2 vols. [Studien zu den Bogazköy-Texten 27 – 28; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1983 – 84]; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1017).

C. Selection of the Sacrifices (16:6 – 10)

> 6“Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement
> for himself and his household. 7Then he is to take the two goats and present
> them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 8He is to cast
> lots for the two goats — one lot for the LORD and the other for the
> scapegoat. 9Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and
> sacrifice it for a sin offering. 10But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat
> shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement
> by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

COMMENTARY

6 The choice of the bull is designated as a purification offering for Aaron and

his household. Given that the priesthood belonged to the family of Aaron, this includes all living priests and provides for their continued service.

This is the first occurrence of the verb *kpr* (“to atone for,” GK 4105) in Leviticus 16. It appeared many times in previous chapters beginning at 1:4, where it carried ideas of “ransom” and “appeasement.” It formed the purpose of the purification offering as described in ch. 4. The repeated emphasis on the sacrifice here “for himself ” suggests that concern with the condition of the priest is paramount. The sacrifice removes all hindrances between the priest and God so that he can perform the offerings on behalf of the people.

7 – 8 The priest brings two goats before God at the Tent of Meeting, where the book began (1:1) and where ceremonial events take place throughout the book. The term “lot” (*gôrāl*, GK 1598) occurs here for the first time in the Bible and only in this chapter (vv.8, 9, and 10) in Leviticus. The practice may refer to the mysterious Urim and Thummim — devices used to determine God’s will (Ex 28:30; Lev 8:8). Instead of concern about *how* the lots are cast, the focus is on the fact *that* either goat might be chosen. The decision remains with God.

9 – 10 This choice anticipates the use made of the two goats in vv.15 – 22. The one selected by lot becomes the purification offering for the people of Israel and is sacrificed so that its blood may purify the Holy Place. The remaining goat survives and receives the sin of the people so that it may be sent into the wilderness “to/for Azazel” and thereby expiate the sins of the people. In fact, vv.6 – 10 are all anticipatory. Except for vv.7 – 8 and the selection of the goat by lot, the remaining verses in this section are substantially repeated in the first part of the following sections: v.11 repeats word for word v.6, v.9 anticipates v.15, and v.10 anticipates vv.20 – 21.

This introductory section serves as the equivalent to many ancient sacrificial texts of the wider world of the OT. Such sacrificial texts, as those that have been found dating to the thirteenth century BC and earlier at cities such as Ugarit, were often administrative records of the number and types of animals to be used in sacrifices to various deities for a particular festival.

But a text from Ugarit (CAT 1.40) also preserves what some have seen as a ritual for atonement. Though vv.6 – 10 do not at first appear to be an inventory,

they are. They demonstrate one of the great differences between biblical sacrifices and those of other religions. The biblical sacrifices required by God contain far fewer animals to be sacrificed. The focus is not on the vast number of animals killed but on the attitude of the participants and their repentance and obedience to God (1Sa 15:22; 1Jn 1:9).

NOTES

8 Azazel (עֲזָאזֵל) has most often been identified as (1) a place in the wilderness (Rashi; Driver, "Three Technical Terms," 97 – 98; Wenham, 235, "a place of destruction"); (2) a demon (Gorman, 97; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1020 – 21); or (3) some combined expression about a departing goat or the like (Kellogg, 266 – 67; H. Tawil, "Azazel the Prince of the Steppe: A Comparative Study," *ZAW* 92 (1980): 43 – 59; Harris, 590; less likely J. De Roo ["Was the Goat for Azazel Destined for the Wrath of God?" *Bib* 81 (2000): 233 – 42], who suggests a metathesis of *zayin* and *aleph* resulting in "wrath of God," but perhaps related to a Hittite term meaning "to overcome divine wrath").

"Azazel" (GK 6439) occurs nowhere else in the Bible — only in 16:8, 10, and 26. A place is not otherwise identified. The idea of a demon contrasts nicely with one goat designated for the Lord and the other for a demon. But there is no evidence that a demon is intended in the text (the reference to "goat demons" in 17:7 uses a completely different word), and the emergence of this understanding is only attested in the intertestamental literature (see, e.g., the role of Azazel in *1 Enoch*, where he is one of the demons that copulate with the daughters of men, Ge 6:1 – 4).

Regarding the Hebrew term, the first two letters (עז) mean "goat" (which appears in 16:5). The last half of the term comprises a root meaning "to go away, be gone" (which occurs in Dt 32:36 and some eleven times in the Bible). Perhaps the text summarizes the departure of the goat through an expression that came to be misunderstood as a proper noun (cf. LXX,"the goat to be dismissed").The objection that this is a place/person to which the goat is sent (*lamed* preposition; Hartley, 237) is not decisive because it may serve as an abbreviated indicator of purpose (i.e., sent for the purpose of dismissing the goat). No solution is certain. For the use of animals for appeasement,

substitution, and transfer in dealing with evil among the Hittites, see the summary of Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1071 – 79.

The Mishnah (*b. Yoma* 4.1 – 2) remembers the selection of goats by lots in the period of the temple during the time of Jesus as one in which two markers — one "for the LORD" and one "for Azazel" — were drawn from a pot by the high priest.

D. The Purification Offering of the Priest (16:11 – 14)

> [11]"Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. [12]He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. [13]He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. [14]He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

COMMENTARY

11 – 13 This section begins with a verse that repeats all that was said in v.6. The purification offering of the bull is thus described and followed by a note that the priest should slaughter the bull. The text then considers the procedure for the high priest to prepare the Most Holy Place so that he can make atonement for himself without dying. The observation that he will not die (v.13) and the use of terms such as "censer" (*maḥtâ*, GK 4746) and "incense" (*qeto*. (*qᵉṭōret*, GK 7792) relate vv.12 – 13 to 10:1 – 2. In both passages there is concern for the holiness of God and a warning not to violate proper procedure when coming close to his presence. In Leviticus 16, however, divine instructions provide for the correct means to obtain the fire and proceed with the incense.

Unlike the "unauthorized fire" of Nadab and Abihu, the fire here comes from

“the altar before the LORD” — most likely the altar of burnt offering placed at the entrance to the tabernacle, which had hot coals available from the sacrifices performed on it (Ex 40:28 – 29). This was a public place, visible to all. The priest then enters the Holy Place, where he is hidden from onlookers. Here he finds the altar of incense positioned in front of the veil to the Most Holy Place (Ex 40:26 – 27). He burns the incense so that the cloud covers the place of atonement behind the veil and thereby hides the presence of God, which no one can see without dying.

14 With the place of atonement so prepared, the instructions return to the blood of the slaughtered bull, last mentioned in v.11. The placement of the blood before the place of atonement on the Day of Atonement is not accidental. Elsewhere with the purification offering (4:7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 8:14 – 15) the blood is placed at the base of the altar of sacrifice in order to consecrate it. Here the high priest sprinkles the blood seven times before the place of atonement. By doing so, he purifies the sanctuary from defilement that has entered into the inner part of the sanctuary. He also reconsecrates the sanctuary (Gorman, 88).

The instructions of v.14 follow a chiastic arrangement — literally:

A let him take the bull’s blood and sprinkle it with his finger
  B before the place of atonement in front;
  B’ before the place of atonement

A’ let him sprinkle seven times with the blood on his finger

This arrangement envelops the place of atonement with the commands regarding the priest’s actions. The blood, with its sprinkling by the priest, becomes the means to the central concern of the passage: access to the place of atonement. It is this access to forgiveness and reconciliation that is provided only by the blood of the slain animal. The same is true of Christ’s work in the NT. The shedding of his blood is necessary for him to present himself as a purification offering for all Christians (Heb 9:22).

NOTES

12 – 13 Rather than the cloud of incense hiding the sinful priest from God's gaze (Keil, 399), it hides the place of atonement and thus serves to protect the priest from seeing God (Wenham, 231).

14, **23 – 24** The high priest bathes and changes clothes on entering and leaving. This symbolizes the change of status and of sacred place. The priest leaves the world of people and mortality and enters the world of God and divine holiness. The bathing and clothing symbolize this change of position, or entry into and exit from "marginal status" (Gorman, 90 – 95), with all of its attendant dangers. The bathing does not symbolize ritual purification from sin alone, because the priest also bathes when he exits the Most Holy Place. Instead, it is a purification that removes anything — holy or unholy — that might be taken into the other world where he finds himself.

E. The Purification Offering of Israel and the Atonement of the Holy Place (16:15 – 19)

15 "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and
take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's
blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. 16 In
this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the
uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been.
He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the
midst of their uncleanness. 17 No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from
the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he
comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the
whole community of Israel.
18 "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the Lord and make
atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the
goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. 19 He shall sprinkle some
of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate
it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

COMMENTARY

15 The purification offering for Israel is summarized. The blood of the goat that was chosen in v.9 is manipulated in a similar manner as the blood of the bull in vv.11 – 14. It is sprinkled over the place of atonement. This represents the purification offering of the people.

16 – 17 Verse 16 reiterates the purpose of this act as bringing about atonement for every act of disobedience by Israel against God. Verse 17 repeats the important purpose of this ceremony, as though to stress the need for reconciliation between the people of Israel and their God. It adds the observation that no one may remain in the sanctuary when the act of atonement occurs. Provision exists only for the priest to enter with the blood. So holy is this place that he requires a separate act of atonement — the sprinkling of the bull's blood — before he is able to function on behalf of Israel. No one but the priest can be near the presence of God at this special time. For the impurities and sins mentioned in v.16, see the Introduction, "Theology."

18 – 19 The atonement of the Most Holy Place symbolizes this act for the whole sanctuary, but the altar of burnt offering requires a separate atonement. Again, both the blood of the bull and of the goat is sprinkled on its "horns " (projections at the four corners on the top of the altar). They may represent the focal points for the intention of the sacrifice on the altar and thus symbolize the purpose and function of the whole altar. If the sanctuary is the place where God can meet with his people annually for purposes of restoring fellowship and symbolizing his continual presence with Israel, the altar of burnt offering is the place where restoration and fellowship take place on a daily basis between individual members of the community and God. The offerings presented there are the means by which the believing Israelite can find forgiveness and worship God throughout the year.

NOTES

15 – 16, **19** For Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16* , 1033 – 35, 1079 – 84), the primary purpose of "atonement" (*kipper*, GK 4105) is purification of the sanctuary. But in this context ("rebelllion of the Israelites") he acknowledges its additional implication of forgiveness for intentional sins (as in "rebellions" [*peša*ᶜ,

GK 7322]; Hartley, 240).

19 The altar, exposed to the air and to regular contact with laity, is the most vulnerable of all the holy objects and thus may especially require the sevenfold application of blood (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1039).

REFLECTION

In the NT the author of Hebrews recognizes the superiority of Christ's sacrifice of his own blood for the forgiveness of our sins. He stresses repeatedly that this act was "once for all," in contrast to the many times each day that the priest acted for individual Israelites at the altar, or annually for the entire nation (Heb 7:27; 9:12, 26; 10:10).

F. Atonement for Israel (16:20 – 22)

20 "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place,
the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. 21 He
is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the
wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them
on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of
a man appointed for the task. 22 The goat will carry on itself all their sins to
a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

COMMENTARY

20 – 22 This section describes the activity of the remaining goat. It is not killed for sacrifice but receives on its head the sins of all Israel. The priest sends it to a wilderness region that is uninhabited. An assistant goes with the goat to guarantee that it reaches its destination. While the death and blood of the one goat purified the sanctuary, the second goat carried away the sin so that it disappeared from the camp.

The picture of the goat, a small creature, as running from the sanctuary through the camp to the regions outside created a twofold impression. First, it symbolizes the purity of the camp and its holy state despite the sins of the people. Here is the beginning of another year with the opportunity to start afresh in following God and loving him with one's entire being (Dt 6:4 – 9). God's grace and forgiveness provide a new opportunity and a wonderful freedom from guilt.

Second, the departure of the goat outside the camp and the subsequent removal of all impurities to the same region (vv.23 – 38) demonstrate the danger of leaving the holy community and separating from the holy place that Israel's God provided for meeting with his people. In the camp life is guaranteed by God; outside the camp are sin and death. The community is key to a life lived in faithfulness to God (Heb 10:25).

NOTES

21 Milgrom ("Sacrifices and Offerings," *IDBSup* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1976], 765; *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1042) suggests that the use of two hands implied transference, whereas the placement of one hand on the animal (1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 24, 29, 33) described identification with the animal. For Zohar, 615, the two hands indicate that volitional sins will also be confessed. Kiuchi, 153, suggests that in addition the priest acts as a substitute who represents himself and all Israel in guilt when he places his hands on the animal (cf. B. H. McLean, "The Interpretation of the Levitical Sin Offering and the Scapegoat," *SR* 20 [1991]: 345 – 56). The removal of the sin from the camp by the goat corresponds to the bird's removal of impurity in 14:4 – 7, 49 – 53.

22 Gorman, 98 – 100, applies anthropological analysis to the Most Holy Place, where God resides and there is order, and its opposite (the wilderness), where there is chaos. The goat takes the sin away from God's presence, where there is life and well-being, to a place of death and disorder, where the kingdom of God is not present. The Mishnah (*m. Yoma* 6.6) recalls how the goat is driven over a cliff to kill it and prevent its return.

G. The Aftermath: Returning from God's Presence (16:23 – 28)

OVERVIEW

The text considers the actors in the drama of this special day and the means by which they return from their special status or, in the case of the sacrificed animals, the disposal of their carcasses. Thus the texts examine the priest (vv.23 – 25), the individual who guides the goat out of the camp (v.26), the disposal of the carcasses of the bull and goat used for the purification offering (v.27), and the purification of the individual who disposes them (v.28).

> 23"Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place, and he is to leave them there. 24He shall bathe himself with water in a holy place and put on his regular garments. Then he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to make atonement for himself and for the people. 25He shall also burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.
>
> 26"The man who releases the goat as a scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp. 27The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up. 28The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.

COMMENTARY

23 The priest must go to the Tent of Meeting and remove the linen garments used in the ceremony (v.4). Constructed according to God's will, they serve as fitting attire for the priest and preserve him from death. But he cannot wear them at occasions other than those in the sanctuary, lest they be profaned. The recognition that some things in this world can carry a special value and are not to be held up to public ridicule is applied by Jesus to the word of God (Mt 7:6).

24 God commands the priest to bathe before presenting any offering. He bathes at the bronze basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar for burnt offerings (Ex 30:18 – 21).Then the priest presents burnt offerings for himself and for Israel. These seal the whole sacrificial experience with a symbol of commitment and dedication to God by the priest and the Israelites. The burnt offering represents the total dedication of a person to God.

This logically follows the forgiveness of sin that the previous purification offerings have effected. With the possibility of fellowship between Israel and God restored, the burnt offerings define that fellowship as one of total commitment to God and the covenant. The rite of bathing at this point represents the transition from the sacred back to the common, just as the earlier bathing evoked a transition in the opposite direction (Budd, 234).

25 This mentions the burning of the fat of the purification offering. In the description of the purification offerings (4:1 – 5:13), this always represents the concluding action of the priest. As the end of v.24 refers to the atonement made by the offerings, so the burning of the fat on the altar in 4:1 – 5:13 regularly concludes with an observation that this is involved in effecting atonement for the offerers.

26 The person who guides the goat from the camp must also wash both his clothing and skin. This symbolizes the removal of all the impurities of the scapegoat, with its burden of the sins of the people. Only when everything is washed can the “goat herder” return to the community. This confirms the importance of the preservation of holiness in the community. Nothing unclean is allowed to enter.

Though this individual may not have touched anything unclean, according to the requirements of Leviticus 11 – 15, there remains the question of the sin-laden goat. The proximity and perhaps touching of this goat may have created the problem with impurity. Even more important, at the time that atonement has been made for the entire nation, there is special sensitivity to the intrusion of any sin, whether cultic or otherwise, into the purified community.

27 The remnants of the slaughtered bull and goat represent the same uncleanness as that of the goat sent out of the camp. The symbolism of sin

cannot be tolerated among the freshly forgiven Israelites; therefore, it is essential that the remaining parts of the animal be destroyed outside the community. Leviticus 4 stipulated that the bull of the purification offering was to be burned outside the camp in a clean place (4:11 – 12, 20 – 21; 9:11). There is no similar detail as to the disposal of the goat. Nevertheless, the same principle applies: removal of the unclean remnants outside the camp and their destruction by fire.

28 The last verse of this section identifies the person responsible for the burning of these carcasses and describes how this person must wash and bathe. The text uses precisely the same language as that used to describe the one who guided the living goat outside the camp. Throughout this section the different grades of holiness are preserved. There is the absolute holiness of God in the Most Holy Place. To preserve this the priest who officiates and enters that sacred area must change clothes, wash, and offer burnt offerings of dedication as well as complete the purification offering before returning to the holy community. That community must not have its holiness compromised by the purification offerings, so the goats and bull, as well as those involved in moving them and their carcasses outside the community, must be treated in such a way that any sin and impurity they represent do not return to the community.

NOTES

23 – 25 While some rearrange the text or go to great lengths to avoid an interpretation that the high priest would appear naked (cf. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1048 – 51; Ex 22:26), perhaps there was an enclosed area for this procedure to hide the priest from the onlookers (Levine, 108; Hartley, 242).

26 Unlike the high priest, who was specially consecrated with oil and blood, this member of the laity does not enjoy any such immunity from the uncleanness of the goat; therefore, the text requires him to wash (Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1052).

REFLECTION

The value of the holiness of God and of the community remains the key message of these verses. Even full atonement does not remove distinctions of sanctity. Instead, it increases the care with which they are preserved. For the Christian, the picture of Jesus Christ breaking down all barriers to allow access to God for all people is a strong one (Eph 2:11 – 22), symbolized by the tearing of the curtain in the temple at the time of his atoning death (Mt 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk 23:45). But the image of the Holy Place and its demand for sanctity has been transferred from a physical structure to Christians and the church of Christ (Ro 12:1; Eph 2:21; Col 1:22).

H. The Continuing Responsibility of Israel and the Priest (16:29 – 34)

OVERVIEW

Leviticus 16 concludes by discussing the responsibility of the Israelites on this special day (vv.29 – 31) and the permanence of this celebration, which is to go on after Aaron with future priests (vv.32 – 34). The statement concerning the permanence of this ceremony in Israel envelops this conclusion, appearing both at the beginning and end of vv.29 – 34. This represents the concern of the passage to establish the practice so that every Israelite of every generation will participate in the ceremony. With the designation of the particular day of the year when this atonement is made, the text turns to command self-denial and rest.

> [29]"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work — whether native-born or an alien living among you — [30]because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins. [31]It is a sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance. [32]The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments [33]and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community.
>
> [34]"This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites."

And it was done, as the Lord commanded Moses.

COMMENTARY

29 – 31 Every Israelite must participate in the events of the Day of Atonement. In vv.29 and 31 is a concentric structure in which three phrases or ideas are repeated in inverse order: "a lasting ordinance, you must deny yourselves," and a reference to refraining from all work. The expression "lasting ordinance" makes it clear that this is a command with no limit in time.

The expression "you must deny yourselves" demands the full participation of each and every member of Israel. The verb *ʿnh* (GK 6700) in the Piel stem occurs only here in Leviticus and again in the discussion of the same ceremony in 23:27, 32. This term is connected with fasting in the Prophets and Psalms (Isa 58:3, 5; Ps 35:13), though it (or a homonym) is also used of rape or unlawful sex (Ge 34:2; Dt 22:29; Jdg 20:5; 2Sa 13:12, 14; La 5:11) and of general humiliation and defeat (Ge 16:6; Ex 1:11; 22:22; Jdg 16:5; 2Sa 7:10). The idea of fasting is key in Leviticus 16.

The third command is expressed differently in the two verses. Verse 29 forbids any work and commands the inclusion of everyone in Israel, citizens and visitors, in this command. Verse 31 proclaims the day as a sabbath of Sabbaths. The root of "sabbath" (*šbt*, GK 8697) implies that no work is done on that day. Verse 30, lying between these repeated statements, focuses on the purpose of this ceremony: the purification of all sins and full and complete atonement before God. There is little question but that the believer in the OT understood this as a day when all sins were forgiven and there was a full restoration to fellowship with God.

32 – 34 Here the verb "to atone" (*kipper* , GK 4105) occurs five times (see comment at 1:4). It is the first word in v.32, appears three times in v.33, and occurs once more in v.34. Clearly this is the important function of the priest and the sacrifices that are made on this special day. Aaron is identified in Leviticus 16 a total of nine times. He leads the ceremonies and sacrifices on this special day. He was Israel's priest, and all the priestly ceremonies of installation were directed toward him (Lev 8 – 10).

But the instructions affirm that this special day will be celebrated long after Aaron's death; therefore, these verses are concerned to provide for successors to Aaron and to guarantee that the correctly chosen one, the descendant of Aaron, performs the ceremony. Thus the line descends from father to son, beginning with Aaron. Its purpose is atonement and it remains forever. As long as the world continued, there will be sin (Ro 3:23) and the need to deal with it in order to approach a holy God.

NOTES

29 – 34 Some see this as a later addition, arguing that at its beginning the Day of Atonement was not fixed on the tenth day of the seventh month. Thus Solomon's temple dedication, which lasted for a week or more in that month, seems not to have been troubled by interference with this fast day (1Ki 8:65 – 66; 2Ch 7:8 – 10). But if this feast ended on the twenty-second day of the month, there would be no overlap.

29 It seems that fasting symbolized but did not encompass the entire meaning of self-affliction. Though the examples cited in Milgrom (*Leviticus 1 – 16*, 1054) describe fasting for the most part, there is no requirement that the term limit itself to this practice.

REFLECTION

Hebrews 9 and 10 affirm that Christ provided a perfect and complete atoning sacrifice. Thus the OT sacrifices anticipated this full and complete atonement. The death of Christ did not nullify the OT sacrifices; instead, it gave them their complete value in that they participated as signs pointing to the fullness to come. As in the OT, so also in the NT the sinner needs to respond with repentance and faith (Ro 10:9; Eph 2:8 – 9).

V. THE HOLINESS CODE (17:1 – 26:46)

OVERVIEW

Scholars refer to chs. 17 – 26 as the Holiness Code, a collection of laws that concern cultic and priestly matters. It is unique in its scope and breadth, not only among other biblical legal collections but also in comparison with legal collections throughout the ancient Near East. The contents reflect a development from the earlier legal collections (the Decalogue of Ex 20:1 – 17; Dt 5:6 – 21; the Covenant Code of Ex 20:22 – 23:33; and the "Ritual Decalogue" of Ex 34:10 – 23) as well as further reflection regarding sacrificial practices already addressed in the first half of Leviticus. This approach, therefore, understands the Holiness Code as a development of the priestly material of Leviticus rather than either an external incorporation of largely alien material or an earlier collection of laws predating the remainder of the book.

The focus of the laws concerns life for Israel and its worship in the land of Canaan. From the perspective of Leviticus, this is yet to take place. The regulations of the Holiness Code find their natural context in a society settled in the predominantly agricultural lifestyle of early Israel. The absence of royalty and royal contexts and the lack of concern for idolatry and cult centralization that pervade the writing prophets and the period of Josiah suggest that an eighth- or seventh-century BC context for much of this material is unlikely. Even less likely are later socio-historical worlds, with their concerns for priestly rulers and questions of genealogical purity.

A. Prohibitions concerning the Eating of Meat and Blood (17:1 – 16)

OVERVIEW

Leviticus 17 includes five laws that form the overall structure of the text:

prohibition of the slaughter of sacrificial animals without an altar (vv.3 – 7), prohibition of animal sacrifices apart from those offered to the Lord (vv.8 – 9), prohibition against eating blood (vv.10 – 12), procedure for dealing with the blood of hunted animals (vv.13 – 14), and a cleanliness ceremony for anyone who eats dead animals not properly slaughtered (vv.15 – 16). Thus there are three prohibitions followed by two laws detailing procedures.

The first two laws identify the need to relate the slaughter of all sacrificial animals to an altar of the Lord. The first four laws begin with the repeated words, "man, person" (*,îš ,îš*, GK 408), which translations render "anyone." The fifth law begins with a similar "everyone" (*kol ,îš*). Thus this introductory reference, which applies the law to all Israel and in some cases beyond, occurs as a marker for the laws regarding the subject of blood and sacrifice.

NOTES

B. Britt and P. Creehan ("Chiasmus in Leviticus 16,29 – 17,11," *ZAW* 112 [2000]: 398 – 400) identify a literary chiasm extending from 16:29 – 17:11. If correct, this locks together the priestly and holiness sources for Leviticus.

1. Prohibition of Sacrificial Animal Slaughter (17:1 – 7)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: 'This is what the LORD has commanded: [3]Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it [4]instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD —that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people. [5]This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. [6]The priest is to sprinkle the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the LORD. [7]They must no longer offer

any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.'

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a The first two verses introduce this whole collection of laws. As with the sacrifices, the instructions are given both for the priests and for all the people of Israel. No one is omitted, but the distinction between priests and laity remains. Nevertheless, Israel is called to be a holy people, a nation of priests (Ex 19:6); thus, the laws concerning holiness also apply to the nation.

Of all the laws in the Holiness Code, those that define the killing, butchering, and eating of animals form an appropriate connection with the preceding part of Leviticus. Leviticus 16 deals with the sacrifices on the Day of Atonement. It mentions fellowship offerings, also found here. Insofar as Leviticus 16 forms a summary of all preceding legislation regarding the priests, their service, and cleanness/ uncleanness, it completes the first part of the book.

Chapter 17, with a similar emphasis on the slaughter of animals as well as the mention of sacrifices and priests, connects in a variety of ways with ch. 16. Verses 3 – 4 form a literary envelope with 1:2 – 3, allowing animal slaughter only at the tabernacle (Douglas, 226). This chapter also anticipates the various instructions of the Holiness Code, with its concern for the responsibilities of the laity as well as priests. Note that responsibilities for the whole community already appear in 16:29 – 34. Chapter 17 functions as a hinge connecting the public rituals of the previous section with the personal instructions that follow (Wenham, 241; Harris, 593).

2b – 3 This law regulates the slaughter of animals for sacrifice: oxen, sheep, and goats. All such slaughter must take place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. There the priest can offer them as fellowship offerings, sprinkling the blood on the altar and burning the fat to the Lord.

The major issue has to do with the nature of what is slain. Is it specifically a sacrifice, or is the passage commanding that all butchering of meat (of oxen, sheep, and goats) be done as an offering to God? The hypothesis that this refers

only to intentional sacrifices to God has appeal because it would allow for butchering on a broader basis in Israel without the need for an altar. But some point out that this law then recurs in vv.8 – 9 without any significant difference. Further, the description of the slaughter of the animal (v.3) uses the verb *šah*m.*at* . (GK 8821), a term that can refer to killing animals for purposes other than sacrifice (Ge 37:31; Isa 22:13).

Both of these arguments fail, however, because (1) the repetition of a command is not unusual in the Holiness Code (cf. chs. 18 and 20), and (2) this chapter deals with sacrifices; thus, it is natural to understand the verb as referring to sacrifices (N. Snaith, "The Meaning of שְׂעִירִם," *VT* 25 [1975]: 115 – 18; Levine, 113; A. Noordtzij, *Leviticus* , tr. R.Togtman [Bible Student's Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 174 – 75; Hartley, 270 – 71). This agrees with Deuteronomy 12:15 – 16, 20 – 27 and the permission to slaughter nonsacrificial animals outside a sanctuary.

The opportunity to kill the animal, whether inside or outside the camp, suggests environments in which Israelites might either have animals in stalls and pens in their local villages or herd them in open and wilderness areas. The same law would apply.

4 This prohibition stipulates that the disobedient "must be cut off from his people." Previously this expression appeared in Leviticus only in 7:20 – 21, 25, and 27, where it described a capital crime. There as well the concern was with eating blood and with uncleanness in fellowship offerings. But in all occurrences this expression suggests a divinely administered punishment.

5 – 7 The verb used in these verses is the customary one for "sacrifice": *zbh* . (GK 2284). Here it is used only for a meat offering to a deity. Thus the text describes the butchering of meat in the open field as a sacrifice. But this sacrifice may not be to the God of Israel but instead to another object of worship, for it is done "on the surface of the field." That this is the case is confirmed in v.7, which with v.5a envelops the correct procedure that guarantees a sacrifice to the true God (vv.5b – 6). There the description of the fellowship offering parallels the procedure described three times in Leviticus 3. The acts of slaughter by the offerer, sprinkling the blood on the altar by the priest, and burning the fat define a fellowship offering to Israel's God.

Verse 7 describes the practices this law seeks to abolish: sacrifices to other deities, described here by the word for "goat" (*sa*a<mîr). Apparently these goats may be associated with underworld gods, so that the act of killing animals on the ground (rather than on God's altar) describes a form of worshiping these underworld deities. In 1 Samuel 14:32 – 35 Saul's army ate the meat "over (śa<r) the blood," perhaps implying that the blood was poured on the ground as an offering to the deities (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1490 – 93). Saul remedied this by building a makeshift altar and slaughtering the animals there.

The correct remedy is described here. Of course, it presumes that the altar would be within reach of the Israelites. Though the hill country, where Israel first settled, was not a large place, it was impractical to take every animal to a single altar. This may explain the presence of multiple altars and sanctuaries scattered throughout the land, though these became compromised with the worship of other deities and received the opprobrium of the prophets (e.g., 1Sa 7:16 – 17; 1Ki 3:2 – 4).

NOTES

3 – 7 The equation of the spilling of animal blood with the worship of underworld deities occurs in Homer (*Odyssey* 11.24 – 26), in Mesopotamia, and possibly at Ugarit (CAT 1.5 V:4 – 6; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1490 – 93).

4 – 6, **9** The fourfold repetition of "entrance to the Tent of Meeting" provides a structuring device for the chapter. Verses 4 and 9 describe how those who do not bring their offerings to this place will be cut off (Warning, 121).

4 The penalty of cutting off is normally applied to religious rather than civil offenses. It is self-evident that sacrifice touches on religious activities; therefore, the appeal of Milgrom and others that spilling an animal's blood equates with homicide is a secondary issue (as is the implied basis for the "cutting off " punishment as due to God's being the sole blood redeemer for the sacrificed animal; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1458, 1475 – 76).

5 The fellowship offering here becomes an expiation rather than a time of rejoicing as in ch. 3 (cf. v.11; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1478).

7 Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1462) identifies the goat (demons) with Mot, the Ugaritic god of the underworld, and with a goat rite from twenty-fourth-century Ebla for the purification of a mausoleum (Zatelli, 254 – 63). But no explicit evidence ties the "Azazel" of ch. 16 with a goat demon (satyr); therefore, ch. 17 is not a polemic against it.

REFLECTION

Though there is no regulation for Christians about a prescribed central place for worship, this passage does demonstrate the importance God ascribes to the avoidance of any appearance of idolatry. This reminds the NT reader of Paul's warning about the perversion of nature and its transformation of what is God's gift into images and objects of worship (Ro 1:21 – 23). Nor are Christians today far from this when we transform the gifts that God has blessed us with into ends in themselves and worship mammon rather than the Creator.

2. Prohibition of Animal Sacrifices (17:8 – 9)

> 8"Say to them: 'Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice 9and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD — that man must be cut off from his people.

COMMENTARY

8 – 9 The repetition of a divine command to address Israel signals a new instruction. The "alien [*gēr*, GK 1731] living among them" is added to the audience. Here either the burnt offering (*ʿōlâ*, GK 6592) or the sacrifice (*zebah* ., GK 2285) is not offered at the house of Israel's God. These two categories of offering cover all animal sacrifices. The burnt offering is the chief offering of worship, for with it the offerers dedicate themselves wholly to the deity (Lev 1).

The sacrifice includes other offerings that slaughter animals. The command to offer it to the Lord at his house avoids any possible offering or sacrifice to other deities.

The “alien” describes anyone who is not an Israelite but is living in the community of Israel. The previous law dealing with sacrificial animals did not apply to the alien, who need not present sacrifices. But neither Israelite nor alien could sacrifice to a deity other than the God of Israel.The penalty was death, because the crime threatened to destroy the worship of God alone.

NOTES

8 Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1467) regards the terms “burnt offering” and “sacrifice” as a merism for all forms of blood sacrifices.

REFLECTION

For the Christian,the exclusive worship expected here for the nation of Israel forms the basis for the claims of Jesus that he is one with God the Father (Jn 10:30). The divinity of Christ is not that of a second god; rather, it is based on the unity of nature that Jesus shares with the person of God. As God, Jesus receives worship (Jn 20:28).

3. Prohibition against Eating Blood (17:10 – 12)

10“ ‘Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood —
I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off
from his people. 11For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given
it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that
makes atonement for one’s life. 12Therefore I say to the Israelites, “None of
you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood.”

COMMENTARY

10 – 12 This prohibition again includes both Israelites and aliens who reside in Israel. Both vv.10 and 12 identify these two groups and warn against eating blood. Together they frame v.11, which prohibits the eating of blood and explains the prohibition in a series of three clauses. Verse 10 cuts off the offender from Israel. Verses 4 and 9 described the same punishment for violating God's directives, but v.10 changes the passive form of the (Niphal) verb, "be cut off," to the active (Hiphil), "I will cut off." This emphasizes the direct (and "therefore more terrifying" [Joosten, 81]) intervention of God and highlights this third command that lies at the center of the instructions in this chapter.

The three clauses of v.11 are unique in the Bible in their attempt to explain the command not to eat blood. The first and third begin with the primary Hebrew term to explain the cause of something — *kî*. The second clause begins with an emphatic marking of God speaking in the first per-son: "As for me, I have given" (*ʼanî*).

The first clause associates life in some way with the blood. The word for "life" (*nepeš* , GK 5883) describes the basic desire for life in the person and expresses that desire as it enlivens the physical body. In the second clause, the blood becomes the ransom or atonement for the sins of people. This is God's gift to Israel. Instead of demanding their lives for their sins, God allows the people to substitute animals and place their blood on the altar. Thus the lives of the animals take the place of the lives of God's people. Since the blood is intimately and inseparably associated with the life of the living being, it forms the means of ransom or atonement. That is the point of the third clause. This blood cannot be consumed because (1) it belongs to the animal as the symbol of its God-given life, and (2) God possesses it at the altar in order to redeem Israel from her sin and alienation from fellowship with God.

NOTES

10 The term "eats blood" refers to ingesting the fluid as a result of eating meat (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1470). The prohibitions attacked superstitions linking blood consumption with acquiring divine life (Hartley, 278).

11 Hartley, 273 – 78, summarizes the interpretations of this passage — in particular the phrase, "it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life," and the preposition (*b*ᵉ) before "life." That preposition may identify the blood (1) with the life (Jacob Milgrom, *Studies in Cultic Theology and Terminology* [SJLA 36; Leiden: Brill, 1983], 96; Harrison, 181); (2) as a ransom payment (Brichto, 19 – 55; cf. Wenham, 245); (3) as a substitution (or transference, Zohar, 609 – 18); or (4) as a life force to cleanse the sinner and preserve from death (Kiuchi, 108 – 9). This latter reason avoids the problems of separating the life of the blood from the blood itself (first and second views) and of transferring sin to a sacrifice that would then be unclean when placed on the holy altar (third view).

REFLECTION

For the Christian the importance of the blood continues. Indeed, the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 followed the covenant God made with Noah and all of his descendants (all the peoples of the world) that murder was wrong (Ge 9:4 – 6) and that Christians should avoid the eating of blood (Ac 15:29). The NT uses this principle to explain the purpose of the death of Jesus Christ (Heb 9:14, 22). It was a means to atone for the sins of the world (Ro 5:9).

4. The Blood of Hunted Animals (17:13 – 14)

> 13" 'Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth,
> 14because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."

COMMENTARY

13 – 14 This law also applies to both Israelites and aliens resident in the land. It considers the case of the hunter's killing of wild game. Since the animal has already been killed, the question arises as to what should be done with its blood.

In such cases, the blood should be poured out on the ground and covered with dirt. This eliminates any possible use of the blood for ceremonies involved in worshiping deities of the underworld (see comment on v.7). It also affirms that the blood of every animal is the concern of God, not just that of the potential sacrificial animals that may be offered to the Lord. Again, v.14 affirms the identification of life with blood and the prohibition of eating that blood. Note the return to the passive (Niphal) form of the verb, "be cut off," as with the first two laws of this chapter. This expression confirms that breaking this law is a capital offense. But it also lacks the greater emphasis of the active form, "to cut off," as found in the central law of this section (vv.10 – 12).

5. Improperly Butchered Animals (17:15 – 16)

15“ ‘Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean. 16But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible.’ ”

COMMENTARY

15 – 16 This law concerns animals that are discovered dead. Such carcasses are considered unclean. Any contact, including the eating of any part of the animal, results in an unclean state and requires washing all of one's clothes as well as one's body. This removes the stain of contact with the dead body. The law applies both to Israelites and to aliens. On the final phrase, "he shall be held responsible," see comment on 5:1.

Together these last two laws further emphasize the value of all life and the special care given to the symbols of life and death, i.e., the blood and carcasses. The special sanctity of life derives from the gift of life, the *nepeš* (GK 5883), given by its Creator.

B. Illicit Sexual Unions (18:1 – 30)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 18 turns from blood and the worship of other deities to the separation from surrounding societies in terms of various types of sexual unions. The lengthy list of improper unions to near kin (vv.6 – 18) concludes with warnings about other relations (vv.19 – 23), and the whole is framed by observations regarding the need to maintain the covenant with God by avoiding the customs of the surrounding nations.

1. Command for Exclusive Loyalty to God (18:1 – 5)

> [1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'I am the LORD your God. [3]You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. [4]You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God. [5]Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 God addresses Moses here with the command to speak to the Israelites. Leviticus 16 had begun with an address to priests. Then the audience shifted to both priests and laity. Finally it reached an exclusive emphasis on the Israelite laity in 17:13 – 16 and ch. 18.

3 Israel must avoid the laws (*h.uqqôt*, GK 2978) of other nations and observe those of its God (*mišpat*mî*.m* , GK 5477). This verse introduces the prohibition by depicting cultures from which Israel came (Egypt) and to which it is going (Canaan). God's people must avoid the customs of both cultures. The reasons are given in vv.4 – 5.

Both Egypt and Canaan practiced or tolerated forms of incest, adultery, homosexuality, and bestiality. Not only the biblical texts (Ge 19:5 – 8; 39; Eze

16:26; 23:3, 19 – 20) but also Egyptian myths impute practices to gods and goddesses also known in the society. The city-state of Ugarit lay close to the land of Canaan, and its records provide an important source for understanding Canaanite customs through the thirteenth-century BC literary texts discovered there. Practices include, among others, Baal's copulation with a heifer and El's explicit sexual involvement with two goddesses referred to as his daughters. These practices were condemned not only in Israel but also in other cultures. In particular, the Hittites critique some of these in a treaty text and in their law codes. Thus the Bible correctly distinguishes Egyptian and Canaanite customs from those of other ancient Near Eastern peoples.

Forbidding the practice of customs of other nations recalls the frequent warnings to thrust out the inhabitants of Canaan and reject their culture. This becomes explicit in Deuteronomy and Joshua, where it forms a major theological theme (Hess, *Joshua*, 42 – 46). Note that the rejection of the cultural influences of other groups was not unique to Israel. At Ugarit, one ritual text records a confessional liturgy in which the participants reject involvement with the customs of seven people groups listed repeatedly in the liturgy.

4 Nevertheless, the distinctives of the rejection in Leviticus 18, emphasized by its repetition in vv.4 – 5, are the rationales added to each of those verses. The first affirms the covenantal name of God —Yahweh, defined as Israel's God. Neither any other god nor the customs of other deities could be followed. Repeatedly the Canaanite deities would tempt Israel to abandon exclusive devotion to Yahweh and serve them.

5 This second statement affirms that obedience to Yahweh will alone bring life. This challenges the claim of Pharaoh that he and Egypt provided "life." This ideology was widespread in the Egyptian royal court of the late second millennium BC. It included both theological and economic aspects (Mario Liverani, *Prestige and Interest: International Relations in the Near East ca. 1600 – 1100 BC* [History of the Ancient Near East/Studies 1; Padova: Sargon, 1990], 230 – 39). Pharaoh bestowed life on his subjects in that they considered him a god who gave the people the privilege of being close to him and enjoying the "life" that his presence brought. For example, he bestowed food on the multitudes under his care, who would otherwise starve. According to Leviticus, God would provide this life — economically, politically, and in every other way. Israel must trust in Yahweh alone.

These commandments allow the Israelites to actualize their faith and experience the covenant and its blessings (Lev 26:3 – 13; Dt 28:1 – 14). It is not that their obedience earns God's favor, but that the favor, already given freely by God, grows and flourishes in the life of obedience. These two reasons confront the customs of Egypt and Canaan. Note that they do so in chiastic form. In v.3 the order is Egypt – Canaan; in vv.4 – 5 the order changes to Canaan – Egypt and provides reasons to avoid their customs. Further, they anticipate the laws of incest and other sexual aberrations. Because Yahweh alone is Israel's God, he provides fertility for the people and enables them to multiply and to occupy Canaan. Canaanite deities could not provide this, nor could the sexual practices condemned in this chapter. In v.5 the God of Israel alone gives life to the covenantal people. In ch. 18 that confession is set in the context of prohibited sexual unions that challenge the procreation of Israel. Israel will be fruitful and multiply (Ge 1:26 – 28) only if they recognize Yahweh alone as God and discipline their sexual desires as outlined here.

NOTES

3 For the Egyptian myths, see Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1948), 177 – 80. In the myth referred to here, Horus has sex with his mother. On popular customs, see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1518 – 19, 1539. For the first Ugaritic myth, see Nicolas Wyatt, *Religious Texts from Ugarit: The Words of Ilimilku and His Colleagues* [Biblical Seminar 53; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 155 – 60. For El's apparent incest, see Wyatt, 324 – 35. While it is true that this myth is unique at Ugarit in terms of explicit sexual descriptions (see Dennis Pardee, "Ugarit: Texts and Literature," *ABD*, 6:708), it nevertheless formed part of their literature.

The Ugaritic confessional liturgy is found in *KTU* 1.40. For a translation, see Wyatt, 342 – 47. For discussion of this aspect of the text, see Gregorio Del Olmo Lete, *Canaanite Religion*: *According to the Liturgical Texts of Ugarit*, tr. W. G. E. Watson (Bethesda: CDL, 1999), 157 – 58.

REFLECTION

For the Christian the command to abstain from the customs of other peoples remains, but the details of the ceremonial and other laws no longer apply. Nevertheless, it is clear that sexual immorality, including incest, must have no part among the fellowship of believers (Ac 15:20, 29; 1Co 5:1; 6:13; 2Co 6:17).

2. Improper Unions among Kin (18:6 – 18)

6“ ‘No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD.
7“ ‘Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.
8“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father.
9“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.
10“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter; that would dishonor you.
11“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father; she is your sister.
12“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your father’s sister; she is your father’s close relative.
13“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your mother’s sister, because she is your mother’s close relative.
14“ ‘Do not dishonor your father’s brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt.
15“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son’s wife; do not have relations with her.
16“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your brother’s wife; that would dishonor your brother.
17“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.

18“ ‘Do not take your wife’s sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

COMMENTARY

8 – 18 The phrase “to uncover the nakedness of ” (*lᵉgallôt ʿenwat*, GK 1655, 6872), or a slight variation, appears sixteen times in these verses and once more in v.19. It occurs elsewhere in fourteen verses, primarily in Leviticus 20 and Ezekiel 16 and 23. It describes shame that it brings on the guilty party. It normally involves sexually related sin and serves as a euphemism for sexual relations. Such is the case in Leviticus 18.

The following types of sexual relations are forbidden to the Israelite male: mother, father’s wife, sister, father’s daughter, mother’s daughter, granddaughter, stepmother’s daughter (if begotten by father), aunt, paternal uncle’s wife, daughter-in-law, brother’s wife, a woman and her daughter or granddaughter, and a woman and her sister if both are alive. The incest has been identified with those relations that could be found within an extended family such as might live together in a single house.

These incest rules were broken in Genesis when Lot had relations with his daughters (Ge 19:30 – 38) and Judah with his daughter-in-law Tamar (Ge 38). Even Abraham married his half-sister (Ge 20:12). The lack of condemnation in the latter case may suggest that before the institution of this law, practices were not regulated in Israel. Once instituted, however, it remained in effect, and its moral authority was applied to violations in the NT (1Co 5:1).

Of special interest is the prohibition of sexual relations with a man’s sister or stepsister, “whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere” (v.9). Contrast the Hittite law that allows sexual relations with two sisters who are born in different countries. Perhaps the biblical law knew of this legal tradition and excluded it by adding these clauses. If so, the incest laws in Leviticus 18 represent an awareness of a heritage of incest prohibitions in some neighboring lands while at the same time transforming that heritage by comprehensively restricting sexual relations among any “close relative” (v.6).

Thus Leviticus provides a more conservative sexual ethic than any known contemporary people. Not only would these laws minimize birth defects, but they would also prevent women from being used sexually by males of the same family (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1527 – 35; in addition to an avoidance of promiscuity, Elliger, 238 – 40). For Christians this standard remained in effect, as noted above (Ac 15:20, 29; 1Co 5:1).

6 - 18 Of all comparative ancient legal collections, that of the Hittites remains the closest in terms of specific laws regarding incest. Laws 189 - 195 define permitted and prohibited sexual relationships (Hoffner, Laws, 149 - 54, 225 - 26). Banned incest for a male included his mother, daughter, son, father's wife (if the father is living), a woman and her sister (living in the same location), brother's wife (if the brother is living), a (free) woman and her daughter, and his wife's sister and mother. But it permitted sexual relations with a deceased person, a stepmother (if the man's father has died), a woman and her sister living in different countries, and a woman and her sister or mother (if they are slaves).

In the treaty between Suppiluliuma I of the Hittites and Huqqana of Hayasa, clauses forbid sexual relations between the king and any sisters-in-law or female "cousins" or near relatives (Gary Beckman, Hittite Diplomatic Texts [SBLWAW 7; Atlanta: Scholars, 1996], 27 - 28). Though some incest laws are identical, others, as well as distinctions between slave and free, suggest that a different social structure determined the ethics. The Old Babylonian legal collection of Hammurabi includes laws prohibiting sex between a man and his daughter, daughter-in-law, mother, and principal wife of his deceased father (§154 - §158). The prohibitions are more limited and deal only with the closest family relationships between a man and near generations of his family.

17 Sexual relations between a man and both a woman and her daughter is punished more severely, i.e., by burning. This may have prevented promiscuity in a father's household (Milgrom, eviticus 17 - 22, 1547 - 48).

3. Other Improper Unions (18:19 – 23)

OVERVIEW

These verses deal with the topics of sexual relations during menstruation, adultery, child sacrifice, male homosexuality, and bestiality. All of these subjects clearly consider sexual unions — all, that is, except one. The third and central prohibition concerns the practice of child sacrifice to a foreign deity. While this recapitulates an implied theme of the chapter's introduction and anticipates vv.24 – 30 with the concern of adopting the customs and practices of other nations, it also provides a valuable hint as to the significance of these five commands. Not only do these practices relate to sexual improprieties, but they also describe activities of the surrounding nations. In particular, the acts of bestiality suggest events that might be found in the religious worship and among the deities of other peoples.

> 19“ ‘Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.
> 20“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.
> 21“ ‘Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.
> 22“ ‘Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.
> 23“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

COMMENTARY

19 The impurity of menstruation and the warning not to touch a woman at this time reflects 15:19 – 20, 24 and anticipates a similar law in 20:18. The comments in Leviticus 15 are applicable here, as they suggest the impure condition of the woman at this time. Further, they guarantee a period of time each month when the woman would be released from the sexual demands of her husband.

20 Adultery is prohibited here for the first time in Leviticus. It repeats a prohibition from the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:14; Dt 5:18) and anticipates

20:10, where the penalty is death. Adultery tears apart the fundamental building block of human society — marriage and the family. It is the most dangerous of covenantal violations and one that the prophets connect with idolatry (Jer 3:9; 5:7; 7:9; Hos 4:13 – 14).

21 This connection of Israel's sexual immorality and the act of worshiping foreign deities provides a transition to the prohibition of the sacrifice of children to Molech. This activity of child sacrifice is also connected by the use of the same verb as in v.20, "to give" (*ntn*, GK 5989), and the same root for "seed, semen; to sow" (*zr<*, GK 2445/2446).

The gift of a child in sacrifice to Molech is condemned at greater length in 20:2 – 5. Molech is identified with a West Semitic deity of the underworld. Human sacrifice of children seems to be associated with his worship. Thus this prohibition, like the others against various forms of sexual liaisons, is concerned with the legitimate procreation of children as part of the extension of God's kingdom. The worship of Molech inhibits this insofar as it destroys the children after birth. This corresponds to the forbidden sexual practices that, as noted, had associations with foreign deities and cults (Douglas, 236 – 38).

22 This law forbids homosexuality, specifically that between two males (cf. 20:13).The practice of female homosexuality is not specified, but it may be inferred, given the male-oriented nature of the legislation and the assumption that both practices involve the sexual use of a human partner of the same sex as though they were of the opposite sex. The penalty specified in Leviticus 20 is death.

Both this passage and 20:13 describe the violation of this law as "detestable" (*tôʿēbâ*, GK 9359). Of the 118 occurrences of this term, it appears here for the first time in Leviticus. Its previous occurrences in the Pentateuch concern that which is detestable to the Egyptians, not to God or the Israelites (Ge 42:32; 46:34; Ex 8:26). It occurs only six times in Leviticus; the other four occurrences are in the last few verses of this chapter (18:26 – 27, 29 – 30); these occurrences refer to general practices described as Canaanite and as defiling the land (vv.27 and 30).

This concern, as well as the unique designation of homosexuality as "detestable" among all the laws in Leviticus, and the association of this verse

with v.21 and the clear association there with the worship of other deities, suggest that the practice of homosexuality was part of the worship of foreign deities and capitulation to the forbidden and defiling customs of other peoples.

For the Christian, the unique portrayal of this practice with the strongest possible condemnation in Leviticus and its association with groups rejected by God and driven from the land provides a background for Paul to select it as one example of the moral degeneration brought about among those who turn away from the true worship of God (Ro 1:26 – 28).

23 This verse outlaws bestiality (cf. 20:15). Some bestiality did characterize neighboring cultures, and its prohibition provides another example of that which distinguishes Israel from the Canaanites. The word for "perversion" (*tebel,* GK 9316) occurs only here and in 20:12. There it describes incest between a man and his daughter-in-law and demands that both be put to death. It may be inferred that the same punishment is required here, given a consistent use of the term "perversion" and a similar punishment from contemporary Hittite culture, in which (in some cases, at least) bestiality was prohibited.

NOTES

21 On Molech as a deity associated with the underworld and human sacrifice, see G. C. Heider, "Molech," *DDD* , 581 – 85. To the discussion and bibliography there should be added the Punic evidence from (1) Carthage, where six hundred years of burials attest to cremated children, and (2) the Pozo Moro monument in Spain, which portrays a deity of the underworld consuming human and animal sacrifices. See Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in Their Mediterranean Context* (ASORMS 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Aharon Kempinski, "From Death to Resurrection: The Early Evidence," *BAR* 21, no. 5 (September/October, 1995): 56 – 66, 82.

22 Outside Israel, homosexuality is nowhere outlawed explicitly in the ancient Near East (except for the rape of a boy), except in the Middle Assyrian Laws (fourteenth – eleventh centuries BC; though cf. Wenham ["The Old Testament Attitude to Homosexuality," *ExpTim* 102 (1990 – 91): 359 – 63], who suggests it was often considered respectable). In those laws the punishment was for the

perpetrator himself to be sodomized and castrated (Martha Roth, *COS 2*, 355). Elsewhere, its practice seems to have been tolerated, and in some cases perhaps a cultic significance was attached to certain performers. See Hoffner, “Incest,” 82, 85.

This verse and 20:13 have generated much discussion. S. M. Olyan (“‘And with a Male You Shall Not Lie the Lying Down of a Woman’: On the Meaning and Significance of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 5 [1994]: 179 – 206) compares “as one lies with a woman” (*miškᵉbê ʾiššâ*, GK 8886, 851) with “who has slept with a man” (*miškab zak*m *ar*m, GK 8886, 2351). The latter, in all of its occurrences (Nu 31:17 – 18, 35; Jdg 21:11 – 12), refers to a woman who is not a virgin. Olyan defines this as vaginal penetration and correlates the corresponding phrase in Leviticus with anal intercourse.

But it is not obvious that the expression is limited to anal intercourse. Nor does the correlation necessarily follow, because the expressions are not comparable. The Levitical expression uses the plural for the first word and the term for “woman, wife,” not “female” (*nᵉqēbâ*, GK 5922), for the second term. The supposedly comparable expression uses a singular for the first term and the term for “male,” rather than “man, husband” (*ʾîš*, GK 408), for the second term. These differences are not explained; therefore, the limitation of the prohibition to anal intercourse is not proven. (Why this is chosen, while other forms of homosexual behavior are not, is not explained.)

J. T. Walsh (“Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13: Who Is Doing What to Whom?” *JBL* 120 [2001]: 201 – 9), who follows Olyan, argues that the Levitical prohibition: (1) resembles others in the ancient world; (2) rests on a violation of Douglas’s crossing of boundaries (male and female roles being transgressed by a male acting as a female); and (3) originally applied only to a free adult Israelite male who allowed himself to be penetrated in anal intercourse. These limitations are not proven. Walsh focuses on the more distant cultures of Greece, Rome, and Assyria (but there is no evidence that the Middle Assyrian Laws limit their prohibition to forced rape) and never discusses the much closer cultural sphere of the Hittites (the close similarity of the Hittite cultural sphere being a point consistently made by Milgrom in his commentary).

Possible (but unproven) cultural similarities with the distant worlds of Greece

and Rome are of little value for demonstrating cultural norms. The crossing of boundaries that T. M. Thurston ("Leviticus 18:22 and the Prohibition of Homosexual Acts," in *Homophobia and the Judaeo – Christian Tradition* , ed. M. L. Stemmeler and J. M. Clark [Dallas: Monument, 1990], 7 – 23) discusses when applying Mary Douglas's categories does indeed apply for male – male relations. But it logically applies for all forms of homosexual relations, both male – male and female – female. It also logically applies to all God's people, not only to the free adult Israelite male. Leviticus 20:13 specifically includes both participants ("the two of them," *šenêhem*) in the prohibition. Walsh rejects this because he regards this "modification" in 20:13 as a later editorial insertion. This is speculative and unproven.

Finally, one may observe the unusual position of Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22* , 1565 – 70, 1749 – 50, 1785 – 90), who asserts that the phrase "as one lies with a woman" refers only to incestuous homosexual relations among Israelites in the land of Israel. The following criticisms may be presented (see R. S. Hess, "A Reassessment of the Priestly Cultic and Legal Texts," *Journal of Law and Religion* 17 [2002]: 388 – 89):

> First, the actual phrase, "as one lies with a woman," occurs only twice, in these two texts in Leviticus. This in itself is inadequate to argue that it is a technical term with a special usage distinct from the use of these words elsewhere. In particular, the plural form of the word, "as one lies with," occurs five other times in the Hebrew Bible. Of these, one (Ge. 49:4) refers to an illicit sexual act in which Reuben lies with his father's concubine (Ge. 35:22). The remaining four occurrences can all be translated, "beds," and refer to nonsexual contexts (Isa. 57:2; Hos. 7:14; Mic. 2:1; Ps. 149:5). Thus the term is better understood as a reference to a place or places of lying down without prejudice as to illicit sexual activity. Further, though the references in Leviticus 18 and 20 clearly do refer to sexual activity, it is an enormous leap of logic to argue from two occurrences that the term must refer only to the sort of illicit activity described in incestuous relationships. This is especially true (1) when the two occurrences do not require such an understanding, (2) when the meaning of the term itself, i.e., "place of lying down," does not suggest it; and (3) when four of the five other biblical usages of the plural do not allow for such an understanding. The term simply cannot carry the burden of such a highly restricted usage as proposed for it by Milgrom. Finally, the view that the homosexual texts limit their prohibition only to the land of Israel begs the question as to why the legislators set it in a context where Israel is still in the wilderness and has not yet reached the Promised Land. Clearly, the implication of this and other references [is] that it applies to the whole people of God wherever they are.

23 There is no clear reference to bestiality in Mesopotamia. In a Ugaritic text already noted, Baal mates with a heifer. The Hittite laws (§187 – §188, §199 – 200) prohibit bestiality with some animals (cow, sheep, pig, or dog) but allow it with others (horse or mule). The reason for the distinction is not clear but the

death penalty is required.

4. Recapitulation of Command to Devote Exclusive Loyalty to God (18:24 – 30)

> [24]“ ‘Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. [25]Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. [26]But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, [27]for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. [28]And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.
>
> [29]“ ‘Everyone who does any of these detestable things — such persons must be cut off from their people. [30]Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.’ ”

COMMENTARY

24 – 25 Though there is not a literal repetition of the first five verses of this chapter, this conclusion reaffirms the same general points and reinforces them with arguments and warnings. While vv.2 – 3 compared the forbidden practices with customs in Egypt and Canaan, vv.24 – 25 focus on the Canaanites as sinners. Here the emphasis is on the implications of sin. The nations that have done such things have defiled the land and will be driven from it. The land (cf. v.28) becomes an agent independent from the people and able to exercise judgment and cleanse itself (Joosten, 152, 178).

26 As in v.4, so in v.26, the command to keep God’s decrees and laws is repeated and forms the heart of the message of this section. Here the note is added that not only Israelites but also resident aliens must keep these commands. Any violation defiles the land and leads to banishment.

27 – 28 Verse 26 forms the center of a chiasm in which vv.24 – 25 correspond to vv.27 – 28. Both affirm that the present inhabitants of the land have defiled it by disobedience to these decrees. Both describe the land as "vomiting out" (Heb. root קיא, GK 7794) the rebellious, with the former text emphasizing that this is happening to the Canaanites, while these latter verses vow that Israel will also experience it if they disobey.

29 – 30 The conclusion reaffirms the warning and commands. It insists that the purity of the land and Israel's existence there will be threatened by any disobedient citizen unless that person is cut off (Heb. *krt*, GK 4162). This suggests that the whole community rejects the person and applies the penalty. This alone provides salvation for the nation, which separates from sin just as it separates from those with skin disease (Lev 13 – 14).

C. A Summary of the Ceremonial and Ethical Law (19:1 – 37)

OVERVIEW

This text mixes cultic and moral laws. Some of these are related to the Ten Commandments. Compare, for example, the appearance of laws 1, 2, 4, and 5 in vv.3 – 4 and again in vv.30 – 32 (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1600). Note also hints of the opening to the Decalogue in vv.2 and 36 (Ex 20:2; Dt 5:6). But despite occasional allusions (cf. laws 3, 8, and 9 in vv.11 – 12), there is no clear evidence for the occurrence of the remaining six laws of the Ten Commandments. Thus the indications are that the Ten Commandments were known and that some of them were incorporated into the beginning and conclusion of this collection. Many of the laws of ch. 19 are further discussed in Ezekiel 22:6 – 12 (Levine, 125).

There is a chiastic arrangement. Note the additional correspondents of foreign religious practices (vv.4 and 26 – 29) and offerings (vv.9 – 10 and 23 – 25). It appears as though vv.3 – 8 deal with religious concerns, vv.9 – 18 describe ethical matters, vv.19 – 31 focus again on ceremonial and cultic concerns of the people living in the land of promise, and vv.32 – 36 return to the matter of ethics

and justice, with particular concern for those unable to defend their rights. Verses 1 – 2 and 36b – 37 frame the laws with commands to be holy like God and to obey the laws of Israel's Redeemer.

More than any other section in Leviticus, this chapter includes legislation other than cultic matters. It includes concerns for ethics and justice in the land. Nevertheless, the repeated emphasis on the Lord God as holy among his people reminds the reader that these laws are a means of holiness and a means for approaching God in the daily concerns of the community of Israel. For the Christian, their exemplary nature is summarized by the command to love one's neighbor in v.19, lying at the center of the chapter, and in many ways at the heart of the entire Levitical system of law.

Like the Decalogue, these laws provide a summary of critical areas of concern as well as exemplary models for the whole of life. They are not intended to be comprehensive but to provide the student with a guide for understanding the priorities of the Lawgiver and for obtaining the principles that may be applied to other situations in life. Indeed, the reader may relate many verses to stories that teach these principles already in Genesis 12 – 50 (Calum Carmichael, "Laws of Leviticus," *HTR* 87 [1994]: 239 – 56).

"I am the LORD (your God)" appears here seven times in the each of the two major divisions of this chapter (vv.3 – 18, 19 – 36) — more than any other passage of the Bible (vv.3, 4, 9, 12, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30 – 33, 35; Rooker, 251; Warning, 107 – 9).The noun "land, earth" also occurs seven times (9, 23, 29 [2x], 33 – 34, 36), where "your land" in the first and fifth positions anticipates the "land" of Egypt in the six and seventh occurrences (Warning, 77 – 78). These two groups of terms tie together the whole chapter.

1. Command to Holiness (19:1 – 2)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 This introductory note indicates that the source of the instruction is God. The phrase “the entire assembly of Israel” occurs some six times in the Pentateuch: Exodus 16:9 – 10; 35:4; Leviticus 19:1 – 2; Numbers 13:26; 14:7.

The phrase, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy,” closely parallels 20:26 and 21:6, 8. The command to be holy (with the order of the verb “to be” and the word “holy” reversed from 19:2) also occurs in 11:44 – 45 and 20:7. This focuses on God, whose people separate themselves by following the customs and laws that God prescribes. It ties this chapter with the next two as well as with Leviticus 11 and the laws of clean and unclean animals. It points this way to holiness, to becoming like God.

NOTE

2 The address to the “entire” community (<m *â*, GK 6337) occurs elsewhere only regarding the Passover sacrifice (Ex 12:3; LXX and 11QpaleoLev 36 – 37 omit “entire,” but its absence can be explained by haplography), building materials for the tabernacle (Ex 35:1), and the census (Nu 1:2, 18; 26:2). Thus it is especially important and addressed to the entire nation (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1603).

REFLECTION

For the Christian, holiness is also a matter of walking with God. It takes into account conduct. It is true that the believer’s holiness is guaranteed by the grace of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is also true that God declared Israel’s holiness before he gave them the covenant or any of its laws. This was true when Israel experienced the miracle of redemption in the exodus (Ex 12 – 14) and when they accepted God’s covenant and received the atoning blood of the bulls (Ex 24:1 – 9). They had barely begun to live under the covenant at that point, yet they were called to holiness. The same is true of Christians. Redeemed by Christ, Christians are called to holiness in conduct (Heb 12:14; 1Pe 1:15 – 16).

2. Religious Concerns of Holiness (19:3 – 8 [Dt 24:19 – 22; 27:15 – 18])

3“ ‘Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe
my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.
4“ ‘Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am
the LORD your God.
5“ ‘When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in
such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 6It shall be eaten on the
day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day
must be burned up. 7If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and
will not be accepted. 8Whoever eats it will be held responsible because he
has desecrated what is holy to the Lord; that person must be cut off from his
people.

COMMENTARY

3 The first command involves respecting one’s parents, often numbered as the fifth command in the Decalogue (Ex 20:12; Dt 5:16). This Levitical expression is sometimes applied to fearing God (*yr*,, GK 3707). Parents stand in the place of God in relation to their children; therefore, this command also serves to connect the divine realm with the realm of human society.

First and foremost, the biblical commands are directed to adults. The respect of parents involves adult responsibilities. The concept of respect here has economic implications: responsibility for food and clothing. Adult children’s care of parents in their old age provided their only means of well-being after they became too old or infirm to work for themselves. Thus childless people would “adopt” an adult heir who would take care of them in exchange for their inheritance upon their death (cf. examples of adoption contracts from Nuzi). Socially, the respect of parents becomes the model for all hierarchies — both those in the family and those in society.

Attached to the requirement to honor one’s parents is the command to observe the Sabbaths of God, similar to the fourth command of the Ten Commandments

(Ex 20:8 – 11; Dt 5:12 – 15).“Sabbath” originally meant “to cease”; however, the observance of the Sabbath carries with it a positive function as well — “to make holy.” The Sabbath is connected with the sanctification of time, just as sacrifice is related to the sanctification of the world. In each case part of the whole is given back to the Creator in recognition of his prior ownership. This is the key idea behind this law.

4 God here forbids the worship of other deities and the making of images. This resembles commands 1 and (especially) 2 of the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:3 – 6; Dt 5:7 – 10).There is here the refusal to restrict the presence and freedom of the living God in terms of any artificial image or form and an absolute ban on the recognition of any created being as other than what it is, viz., dependent on God for its existence.

The word for “idols” (*ha,*m*e**lîlîm*, GK 496) occurs only here and in Leviticus 26:1 in the entire Pentateuch. Its other nineteen occurrences are mainly in Isaiah and other prophetic books. The word for “cast metal” (*massek*m *â*, GK 5011) appears only here in Leviticus. It occurs previously in the so-called ritual decalogue (Ex 34:17) and otherwise only in the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32:4, 8). Thus Aaron violated the first two commands of the Decalogue when he made the golden calf.

5 – 8 As the rules for the offerings (Lev 1 – 7) were instituted after the incident of the golden calf (Ex 32 – 34), so the instructions on the proper handling of the offerings follow the prohibition not to worship other deities. The fellowship offering, already described in detail in Leviticus 3 and 7:11 – 36 (cf. 7:16 – 18), is the only major sacrifice that involves a portion that is returned to the offerer to eat. It is the only one with an ongoing responsibility after the sacrifice is made. Thus in this chapter, which is concerned with the behavior of the whole community, there is a special concern to remind the citizens of Israel to follow through on their responsibilities to dispose of the offering properly.

Of course the anticipation of eating the meat and the enjoyment that such an event might bring to an individual or family would usually take care of the matter. But any variety of crises or other circumstances might prevent the food from being eaten. In such a case, these verses outline the proper means of disposal. The expression “that it may be accepted” (*lᵉrāṣôn*, GK 8354) occurs seven

times in Leviticus, five of which (1:3; 22:19 – 21; here) place this expression in the context of an animal offered without any defect. As the people are commanded to holiness, so their sacrifices must be whole and fulfill all the conditions.

NOTES

3 Hartley, 304, 313, observes that the position of "mother" before "father" is unusual in the Bible. K. Van der Toorn (*Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985], 14 – 15) notes ancient Near Eastern parallels in which a Middle Babylonian document refers to a man held in custody for beating his mother.

4 The word *ʾelîl* ("idol," GK 496) may derive from a root meaning "empty, ineffective" (Job 13:4; Jer 14:14; Levine, 126).

7 For "impure" (*piggûl*, GK 7002), see the commentary on the parallel passage at 7:18.

REFLECTION

Regarding verse 3, for the Christian the Sabbath continues to be a valid priority. This is not a matter of a specific rule concerning observance of one day in seven in a special way. Instead, it is a recognition that God is the Lord of time and that therefore we should acknowledge this and return to God the first and best part of the "time" he has given to us. This can be done by setting aside one day in seven — such as Sunday, the day of Christ's resurrection — in a special way to God (Mt 28:1; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:1; Jn 20:1).

3. Ethical Concerns of Holiness (19:9 – 18)

9"'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges

of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. [10]Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

[11]“ ‘Do not steal.

“ ‘Do not lie.

“ ‘Do not deceive one another.

[12]“ ‘Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

[13]“ ‘Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

“ ‘Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

[14]“ ‘Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.

[15]“ ‘Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

[16]“ ‘Do not go about spreading slander among your people.

“ ‘Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD.

[17]“ ‘Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

[18]“ ‘Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

COMMENTARY

9 – 10 A shorter form of this law occurs in 23:22 and a longer form in Deuteronomy 24:19 – 22.The leaving of a remnant of the harvest was known elsewhere in the ancient Near East as a means of providing for the poor. But the addition of the “alien” (*gēr*, GK 1731) is unique to Israel. In this way concern for the needs of others reached beyond one’s own family, friends, and village to include the whole of humanity. Here is anticipated the NT story of the good Samaritan (Lk 10), which attempts to answer the question, Who is my neighbor to whom I should show love? The best example of this in the Bible is that of the Moabitess Ruth, who gleans in the fields of her future husband, Boaz (Ru 2).The right of an alien to glean is secured by this law.

The phrase “I am the LORD your God” appeared in vv.2, 3, and 4. It formed a

refrain for the religious concerns of the laws in the previous section. Verses 12, 14, 16, and 18 will use the refrain, "I am the LORD." This is slightly different and yet raises the question as to why, in this ethical text, a refrain should be used that associates the verses with the previous section on religious concerns. This concludes the previous section, insofar as concern for the poor is closely tied to religious laws and priorities; at the same time it begins the next part of the chapter dealing with ethical matters (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1623 – 29).

11 This section deals with various ethical laws. Verse 11 recalls the eighth and ninth laws of the Decalogue — those forbidding theft and false witness. But the ninth command uses different language. The command to refrain from deceiving one's neighbor repeats the shorter version of "Do not lie." Its repetition emphasizes a command difficult to enforce but one that appeals to the conscience of every God-fearing Israelite.

12 The command to not swear falsely by God's name is logically associated with the prohibition of lying. These two are separated in the Decalogue but belong together here as activities of wrongdoing. In the context of Leviticus 19, this command provides another repetition of the basic concern not to lie. Here the first reason is given: it profanes God's name.

The term for "profane" (Heb. root *h.ll*, GK 2725) occurs numerous times in Leviticus, most often in association with the profanation of people and their association with priestly families in chs. 21 and 22. But it occurs five other times in addition to this verse and in relation to profaning the name of the Lord. It describes acts of sacrificing children to Molech (18:21; 20:3), making one's daughter a prostitute (20:3), eating the fellowship offering three or more days after the sacrifice (19:8), and otherwise treating Israel's offerings to God without respect (22:2). Thus the concerns have to do with gross immorality, idolatry, and violations connected with something dedicated to God. Both the ethical act of lying and the religious act of invoking the Lord's name are transgressed in this warning.

13 The first verb here, "defraud" (*ʿāšaq*, GK 6943), appeared as an offense requiring reparation in 6:2, 4 ("extortion"). In Deuteronomy 24:14 the same verb is rendered "take advantage of." The implication is that of using one's position, power, or knowledge to cheat someone else. Also in 6:2, 4 the verb "rob" (*gāzm*

al, GK 1608) occurs. Both of these expressions describe someone who treats others unjustly and takes property that does not rightfully belong to him or her. The matter of the day laborer and paying the wages before the next day has a parallel in Deuteronomy 24:14 – 15. Jesus in his parables recognized this principle (Mt 20:8).

14 Here justice concerns the deaf and blind. Cursing the former and tripping the latter are offenses that exemplify the humiliation of others. As such they devalue the image of God in which all people are created (Ge 1:26 – 28). Such dishonorable activity dishonors God's image and therefore insults God — hence the warning to fear God.

15 This text continues the theme of justice with broad statements affirming the cause of justice for all. Interestingly, here as in Exodus 23:3 favoritism toward the poor is condemned as readily as favoritism toward the wealthy. While the latter would present the greater temptation, the text affirms an equal measurement for all, with no special treatment.

16 The term for "slander" (*rāk*m *îl* , GK 8215) occurs elsewhere in the prophets (Jer 6:28; 9:4[3]; Eze 22:9) and in Proverbs (11:13; 20:19; "gossip"). In Ezekiel it is associated with murderers and idolaters. Slander betrays trust and destroys the basis for a relationship. The expression "endangers your neighbor's life" literally says, "stand on the blood of your neighbor." The expression "on the blood of " (*ʿal dam*) is found in terms of relationships only twice elsewhere (Jer 22:17; Eze 22:13). In both contexts it appears alongside the sense of dishonest gain and advantage. Here it may suggest speaking and so acting against the life of one's neighbor (Hartley, 316; Budd, 277).

17 – 18 These two verses complement each another. There are four phrases that can be arranged as follows:

Do not hate your brother in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbor frankly and so you will not share his guilt.

Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people,

but love your neighbor as yourself.

The first and fourth lines are in parallel, while the second and third lines seem unrelated. But it may be that a major use of “hate” and “love” involved their sense in treaties and covenants. “Hate” refers to the breaking of covenants and loyalties, and this connects with v.16. Further, the danger of breaking covenants can only be avoided by complete honesty; therefore, there is an exhortation to be as frank, open, and honest as possible.

The need to rebuke provides a legitimate and honorable means of dealing with revenge and grudges. Without honest and open communication, hatred can remain buried deep inside. If all people can express their grievances and listen honestly, there is the possibility of reconciliation (Ge 21:25; Pr 9:8; 15:12; 19:25; 27:5; Mt 18:15 – 22; Gal 6:1; cf. Wenham, 268).

Further, “love” can carry the sense of loyalty to one’s word or to one’s neighbor (as expressed in deeds, Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22* , 1653; Abraham Malamat, “ ‘Love Your Neighbor as Yourself ’: What It Really Means,” *BAR* 16, no. 4 [1990]: 50 – 51). Thus it is important not to do anything that would destroy that loving and loyal relationship. Jesus includes this text as a summary of one of the two major commands in which all the law is encapsulated (Mt 22:39 – 40; Lk 10:25 – 28). This text forms the literary center of Leviticus 19 and in some ways the center of the entire book, insofar as it is addressed to the Israelites as a call to holy living before God.

4. Ceremonial and Cultic Concerns (19:19 – 31 [Dt 22:9 – 11])

19“ ‘Keep my decrees.
“ ‘Do not mate different kinds of animals.
“ ‘Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed.
“ ‘Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of material.
20“ ‘If a man sleeps with a woman who is a slave girl promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. 21The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for a guilt offering to the LORD. 22With the ram of the

guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the LORD for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven.

23“ ‘When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree, regard its fruit as forbidden.

For three years you are to consider it forbidden; it must not be eaten. 24In the fourth year all its fruit will be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. 25But in the fifth year you may eat its fruit. In this way your harvest will be increased. I am the LORD your God.

26“ ‘Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it.

“ ‘Do not practice divination or sorcery.

27“ ‘Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard.

28“ ‘Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD.

29“ ‘Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness.

30“ ‘Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.

31“ ‘Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God.

COMMENTARY

19 Of the many occurrences of the word “decrees” (*ḥuqqōt*, GK 2978) in Leviticus, there is a consistent pattern of applying it specifically to apodictic laws that concern religious matters. For this reason Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1657) may indeed be correct that the term in v.19 refers only to the three laws there. These laws are parallel with the ones in Deuteronomy 22:9 – 11, which forbid sowing different seeds together and wearing cloth made of wool and linen. The first prohibition — that against the mating of different species of domestic animals — is not found in Deuteronomy. Instead, Deuteronomy 22:10 prohibits plowing with a team of an ox and ass. Indeed this may be the meaning of the verb (*rbʿ* GK 8061) here; it never refers to mating but to crouching (under a common yoke —also the understanding of the LXX).

The purpose behind the prohibitions in Leviticus is not explicitly given, but

those in Deuteronomy may imply greed, as in sowing two types of plants on the same tract of land. Nevertheless, Leviticus seems more concerned with avoiding mixtures of living creatures that were created and intended to remain separate. It permits no mixing or hybridization of what God has separated. The orderliness in life and creation becomes a principle that the writers of the NT appeal to regarding the orderliness of worship and the assembly of God's people (Heb 10:25).

20 – 22 The case of the betrothed slave woman must remain separate from that of a betrothed free woman, in which the man would be put to death (Dt 22:23 – 27; cf. Hammurabi Law §130). But the text states explicitly that the woman's slave status removes the possibility of the death penalty. Further, the absence of mention of reparations, either to the owner or to the prospective bridegroom, suggests that the "punishment" does not involve reparations to them. Indeed, the state of the betrothed slave woman is marginal to her slavery because she has been betrothed; therefore, the owner does not have the customary claim on her. It is also marginal to her marriage because she is not yet married; therefore, the prospective bridegroom does not have the claim of a husband.

Instead, the only punishment specified requires the payment of a reparation offering to the Lord. A ram implies a serious and expensive reparation. It suggests that the truly offended party is God, whose bans on adultery and sexual intercourse outside marriage have been violated. Thus the holiness of the community is compromised and a reparation offering is necessary to restore Israel's state of purity before God. For the Christian, the concern for purity in matters of sexuality does not lie with external states of holiness before God as much as it deals with the body of the believer, which itself is a temple of God (1Co 6:12 – 20).

23 – 25 Though offering firstfruits of other produce is assumed, the concern for the fruit tree, where there is a five-year period of waiting, requires explicit discussion. Verse 23 begins, "When you enter the land and plant any kind of fruit tree," and it ends, "it must not be eaten." Between these phrases the text literally says, "You shall treat its foreskin with its fruit as a foreskin. For three years you are to consider it as uncircumcised." This pictorial description involves the plucking of the buds of the fruit tree before they open. This procedure enables the tree to achieve maximum fruit-bearing potential (see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 –*

22, 1679, 1684; cf. Philo, *Virtues* 156). In the fourth year the fruit appears. These firstfruits should be presented to God (Ex 13:2, 12; Nu 18:12 – 13, 17). Finally, the fifth year serves as the first harvest that the owner of the tree may enjoy.

This practice not only reaffirms the offering of the firstfruits of all that God gives to his people but also aids in fulfilling the creation mandate that life should become fruitful (Ge 1:11 – 12, 28). It does this by increasing the fruitfulness of the trees. Such a picture anticipates the images Jesus uses in encouraging his disciples to be fruitful and suggests the need for proper preparation for any such fruit bearing (Mt 3:10; 12:33; Lk 3:9; 6:43 – 44; Jn 15:5 – 16).

26 – 28 (Dt 18:9 – 13) While these verses appear at first as a diverse collection of rules, closer inspection relates all of them to other deities and particularly to the worship of spirits of the dead (chthonic worship). The basic prohibition of eating blood is found in the Noahic covenant (Ge 9:4), but the expression here is literally, to eat “upon the blood” (*ʿal haddāam*m). The verb “to eat” with this idiom occurs only three other places: 1 Sam uel 14:32, 33; Ezekiel 33:25. The first two describe a condemned practice by Saul’s warriors, who were famished after a successful battle and ate the enemy’s livestock after butchering them on the ground without a stone or platform that could drain the blood. The Ezekiel context, however, associates idolatry with this practice; therefore, there is more involved than the prohibition of eating meat with blood in it. The idolatrous characteristics associate the first part of v.26 with the prohibition against divination and sorcery in the second part. These two terms concern consulting with the dead and with spirits to determine (not control) the future (cf. Hartley, 320; cf. also Dt 18:10; 2Ki 21:6; 2Ch 33:6, though their precise usage cannot be determined).

The prohibition of cutting hair and beards occurs for the priests in Leviticus 21:5 and Ezekiel 44:20. Its general application to Israel also appears in Deuteronomy 14:1, where it is explicitly associated with mourning rites for the dead. This association also seems to occur in the prohibition against gashing one’s body. Evidence that Israelites and their West Semitic neighbors did this as a mourning ritual for their dead can be found in Deuteronomy 14:16; Jeremiah 16:6; 41:5; 47:5; 48:37; and Ugaritic text KTU 1.5 VI 11 – 25. Evidence that it could also associate a participant with the worship of foreign deities occurs in 1 Kings 18:28.

The prohibition of tattoos or marks on one's body (with Hartley, 321, suggesting that painting the body is intended) seems to have no clear association with mourning for the dead or worship of other deities. Its position here is a testament to the body as created in God's image (Ge 1:26 – 28) and therefore, like cutting the hair and the body, disfiguring or deforming the body by marking it in this way has no part in what God has created. Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1694 – 95) reviews the rabbinic discussion with regard to the marking of a slave, mandated in Exodus 21:6 and Deuteronomy 15:17.

He argues that this text moves in the direction of banning slavery because it denies the right to mark another human being as one's perpetual property.

29 For the debate concerning the cultic nature of prostitution, see the Notes. The few attested temple and cultic associations elsewhere in the ancient Near East do suggest that this practice, in addition to its licentiousness and financial rewards, was performed as a means of honoring deities; therefore, the prohibition here could also be related to idolatry. The close association of idolatry and sexual immorality also involves God's gift of the land to Israel as a reward for its covenantal obedience. This gift could be abused and lost by the people if they forsook God and gave their daughters away to engage in this sort of sexual immorality.

30 These twin commands focus on the Sabbath, which represents the sanctification of time (see comments on v.3), and the respect for the Holy Place, which represents the sanctification of space. Like the firstfruits of life, these other areas of existence also have their markers that point to and are devoted to God. The specifics about the keeping of the Sabbaths occur throughout the law. Those regarding respect for the Holy Place are not so clear; however, the commands concerning its construction (Ex 25 – 30; 35 – 40), the use of it in sacrifices (Lev 1 – 7), and the conveyance and care of it (Nu 4 and 8) contain sufficient detail to encourage this reverence. The respect of God's house remained a concern for Jesus, nowhere better demonstrated than in his driving out of the moneychangers (Mt 21:12; Mk 11:15; Jn 2:15).

31 These prohibitions require one to turn away from all forms of consultation with the dead. Isaiah 19:3 and Deuteronomy 18:11 explicitly associate these terms with consultation with the dead spirits. The terms for mediums and

spiritists occur together in similar prohibitions in Leviticus 20:6, 27 and Deuteronomy 18:11. Leviticus 20:27 demands the death penalty for any who practice these occupations. Manasseh is condemned for his consultation with these figures (2Ki 21:6; 2Ch 33:6) and Saul engaged one (1Sa 28) after banning them (28:3). Josiah, on the other hand, attempted to rid the land of them (2Ki 23:24). Though they do not appear after that note, the number of times the Bible mentions them attests to their early and significant presence.

The references to Manasseh also describe his practice of "sorcery" and "divination." These terms appeared in Leviticus 19:26 and suggest a meaning similar to the occupations of this verse. Further, they raise the question as to whether vv.26 and 31 form an inclusio for the entire section between them, so it all describes chthonic ceremonies and practices as well as the orthodox Israelite alternative (v.30).

NOTES

19 Though the priests wore mixed wool and linen, it was forbidden to the laity. Mixed threads have been found at Iron Age cultic centers in the Negev (Kuntillet <Ajrud and Timna Valley; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1662).

20 Wenham, 270, and Harris, 607, follow Speiser, 128 – 31, in translating "there must be due punishment" (*bqrt*) as "damages must be paid" to the betrothed man. This is reviewed by B. Schwartz ("A Literary Study of the Slave-Girl Pericope — Leviticus 19:20 – 22," in *Studies in the Bible*, ed. S. Japhet [ScrHier 31; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986], 247 – 51), who (cf. 27:33) translates, "a distinction is to be made."

22 That guilt before God is involved in such sexual sin is a common theme throughout the ancient Near East. In all cases of adultery with a married woman, the death penalty was invoked (cf. rape, which is not envisioned here, contra Gerstenberger, 274). In this case, the woman was not married and a slave (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1671 – 74). But as in ch. 5, a guilt offering can atone for an intentional sin (Schwartz, 252 – 55).

26 The LXX, reading a slightly different Hebrew original, renders “on the mountains” for “upon the blood.” Compare Ezekiel 18:6 – 15; 22:9; 33:25.

29 Contrary to Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1696) and van der Toorn (“Female,” 193 – 205; *From Her Cradle*, 93 – 110; “Prostitution (Cultic),” *ABD*, 5:510 – 13), there are hints that prostitution may have been understood as cultic in some contexts in the ancient Near East. Lambert, 127 – 57, identifies a variety of types of prostitution, from that which had no apparent association with any cult to all sorts of prostitutes associated with the cult. But he observes that all prostitution was by definition sacral or a sacrament because the sexual act was a natural force personified in the goddess Inanna/Ishtar. Some prostitutes had a distinctive dress and hairstyle. Lambert also notes that prostitution “was perhaps the only profession that allowed a woman to earn a good income outside the family” (135).

That cultic prostitution does not appear in the ancient Near Eastern law codes does not prove it did not exist. Studies of the account of the Greek historian Herodotus describe how all women in Babylonia participated in cultic prostitution at one point in their lives. Lambert notes that simply because this is a late source does not mean that it is incorrect.

31 For an understanding of , *ʾōbōt* (“mediums,” GK 200) as those who dig pits to summon the dead and for its association with family and Molech cults, see Hoffner, “Second Millennium Antecedents”; Wenham, 273; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1768 – 85.

5. Matters of Ethics and Justice (19:32 – 36 [Dt 25:13 – 26])

32“ ‘Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and
revere your God. I am the LORD.
33“ ‘When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him.
34The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born.
Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your
God.
35“ ‘Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or
quantity. 36Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an

honest hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt.

COMMENTARY

32 If the analysis of v.31 is correct, then the reader may expect to encounter an admonition regarding the elderly in Israelite society. If the Bible forbids the venerating of the dead, it also requires care for the elderly. What follows forms an expansion on v.3 — the honoring of one's parents. As there, the command to "show respect" (*hdr*, GK 2075) is also applied to God (e.g., Pss 96:6; 104:1; Isa 2:10, 19, 21; 35:2; 63:1) as well as to other people.

The close juxtaposition of these two lines with a third one describing honor toward God reinforces the view that this command interprets parents as standing in the place of God. This is especially true in Israel, where all that a child knew about God came from the parents (Dt 6:7 – 8). For this reason the command's place in the Decalogue forms a hinge between the preceding commands, which deal with God, and the remaining commands, which concern matters of human society. Thus the parental position becomes crucial for the continuance of the faith, and the children should continue to respect their parents into their old age.

Further, this principle extends to society in general, as v.32 suggests. It does not specify the parents but generalizes to include all the senior citizens one might encounter (Ex 18:13; 1Ki 22:19). Such a broadly based command provides for a society that takes care of its elderly — a principle that remained a concern for the early Christians (e.g., 1Ti 5).

33 The concern for the sojourner continues the theme of those who are least able to defend themselves in Israelite society, viz., those who have a vulnerability of some sort or another. From a legal sense, few individuals suffered greater risk than the sojourner or "alien" (*ger*m, GK 1731). Such an individual was not a citizen of the country or a member of the society; therefore, no law collections in the ancient Near East accorded this person any legal rights (Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law* [JSOTSup 107; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], 34).

The opposite is true in Israel. The rights accorded to the widow and orphan or

to disadvantaged members of society were regularly given to the alien. The prohibition against oppressing an alien occurs at least four other times in the Law and the Prophets (Ex 22:20[21]; Jer 22:3; Eze 22:7, 29); and there are numerous provisions for aliens throughout all the legal collections. This concern appears in the NT, where Christian concern is directed to those who have no resources or powers to defend themselves (see especially James).

34 The command to treat the alien as a "native-born" (*,ezrah*m ,. GK 275) unites two social groups that elsewhere serve as contrasting members of the population (Ex 12:19; Lev 24:16). Further, the recollection of being aliens in Egypt is mentioned three other times, always in the legal collections and always as a motive clause for a command to care for the aliens among the Israelites (Ex 22:20[21]; 23:9; Dt 10:19). Thus this motive forms a serious priority for Israel, as its obedience connects their present experience with that of the exodus generation and enables them to avoid the same injustices that led to God's overthrow of the Egyptians and to Israel's redemption. Is it any wonder, then, that the Christian finds in Jesus an example of one who provided for the needy and associated this work with the kingdom of heaven (Mt 11:5; 19:21; Mk 10:21; Lk 4:18; 6:20; 7:22; 11:41; 12:33; 14:13; 18:22; 19:8; Ac 10:4, 31)?

35 – 36 The command for honesty in business dealings covers yet another area of relationships. Having specifically dealt with the blind and deaf (v.14), daughters (v.29), the elderly (v.32), and the alien (vv.33 – 34), the text turns to consider the general mass of society that may be susceptible to dishonesty — a correspondent to vv.11 – 12. The term for "scales" (*mō ̄znayim*, GK 4404) occurs eight other times in the Prophets and Wisdom Literature, either approving honest ones (Job 31:6; Pr 16:11; 20:23; Eze 45:10) or disapproving dishonest ones (Pr 11:1; Hos 12:7; Am 8:5; Mic 6:11).

The term for "weights" is the same as "stones" and refers, of course, to that which balances the scales to determine the true weight. Thus false weights were integral to dishonest balances. The ephah occurred in Leviticus 5:11 and 6:20 as a dry measure for the flour of a purification offering and a grain offering. The hin is a liquid measure (cf. 23:13). Thus dry and liquid quantities and weights cover the entire range of the measurement of commodities that might be bought and sold in the marketplace of ancient Israel.

6. Summary (19:37)

37“ ‘Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the LORD.’ ”

COMMENTARY

37 The conclusion of ch. 19 does not repeat the opening two verses. But vv.1 – 2 commanded holiness and this verse summarizes the means to holiness: faithfulness to the entire covenant, with all of its laws. It may be possible to distinguish between the “decrees” (*ḥuqqōt*, GK 2978) and the “laws” (*mišpāṭîm*, GK 5477) insofar as the former emphasizes the apodictic and general commands covering all cases (e.g., Do not steal; Do not lie), while the latter describes judgments such as a court might deliver in a particular case. Furthermore, the former tend toward the religious, whereas the latter focus on the social.

D. Israel’s Holiness in the Family (20:1 – 27)

OVERVIEW

This text, following the customary beginning, repeats and summarizes many of the earlier statements. As in ch. 18, Israel must avoid all the practices that characterize the surrounding nations. Thus ch. 19 explains and emphasizes those aspects that might cause Israel to compromise its holiness. This emphasis repeats commands, more or less the same, that have already been given in Leviticus:

with vv.2 – 5 (child sacrifice to Molech), cf. 18:21
with v.6 (mediums and spiritists), cf. 19:31
with v.7 (command to holiness), cf. 19:2
with v.8 (command to obedience), cf. 18:5, 26
with v.9 (respect parents), cf. 19:3
with v.10 (adultery), cf. 18:20
with v.11 (incest with stepmother), cf. 18:8
with v.12 (incest with daughter-in-law), cf. 18:15
with v.13 (homosexuality), cf. 18:22
with v.14 (incest with mother-in-law), cf. 18:17

with vv.15 – 16 (bestiality), cf. 18:23
with v.17 (incest with a sister), cf. 18:9
with v.18 (sex during menstruation), cf. 18:19
with vv.19 – 20 (incest with aunt), cf. 18:12 – 13
with v.21 (incest with sister-in-law), cf. 18:18
with vv.22 – 23 (warning not to conform), cf. 18:26 – 30 v.24 (promise of land)
with v.25 (distinguish clean and unclean animals), cf. 11:47
with v.26 (command to holiness), cf. 20:7
with v.27 (mediums and spiritists), cf. 19:31; 20:6

Thus, except for v.24, every part of this chapter has parallels with earlier texts. These similarities cluster in ch. 18, especially the laws concerning Molech (vv.2 – 5), incest, and other sexual acts (vv.10 – 21).The arrangement of these laws in ch. 18 is determined according to degree of kinship, beginning with the closest and proceeding to the distant relations. The arrangement of these laws in ch. 20 is concerned with the degree of punishment, beginning with those that require the death penalty (vv.9 – 16), moving to those that result in being cut off (vv.17 – 18), and finally to those carrying a "lesser penalty" of general guilt and/ or childlessness (vv.19 – 21). Also, ch. 18 points to punishments for disobedience, whereas ch. 20 points to the achievement of holiness (v.26) through obedience (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1767).

If vv.10 – 21, including the laws of sexuality, form the center of this chapter, then general calls to obedience and promises of blessing frame this section in vv.7 – 9 and 22 – 26. These sections are further surrounded by statements forbidding association with mediums and spiritists (vv.6 and 27). A section on infant sacrifice to the god Molech introduces the material. It illustrates the consequences of sinking to the level of the surrounding nations.

The verb "to give" (*ntn*, GK 5989) occurs seven times: the first five concern Molech worship (vv.2, 3a, 3b, 4, 6), and the sixth addresses sodomy (v.15); but the seventh focuses on the promise of God's gift of Canaan to Israel (v.24). This statement also contains the seventh occurrence of the pronoun "I" (*ʾnḵ*; Warning, 78 – 79). This supplies further evidence for the positive nature of ch. 20 in contrast to ch. 18.

1. Introduction (20:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]“Say to the Israelites . . .

COMMENTARY

1 This is the fifteenth occurrence of this introductory phrase in Leviticus (since 4:1) and the fourth time that it introduces a chapter in the Holiness Code.

2a The introductory command, “Say to the Israelites,” appears in a similar form ten times in the book (4:2; 7:23, 29; 9:3; 11:2; 12:2; 20:2; 23:24, 34; 24:15) in a variety of texts and circumstances. But only here does it use “say” (*,amm ar*, GK 606) rather than “speak” (*dibber*m, GK 1819). Further, the second person masculine singular imperfect form of this verb appears elsewhere in Leviticus only in 17:8. There it forbids making sacrifices other than at the sanctuary — a practice set in the context of the prohibition of sacrifices to other deities (v.7). This parallels the concern of ch. 20 to avoid the customs of other nations. Specifically, it anticipates vv.2 – 5 and the sacrifice to foreign deities.

2. Molech (20:2b – 5)

[2]“Say to the Israelites: ‘Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him.

[3]I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. [4]If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, [5]I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.

COMMENTARY

2b For a discussion of this practice of giving a child to Molech and for information regarding the deity, see comments on 18:21. The expression “give

any of your/his children to Molech" is identical in ch. 18 to that here, where it is repeated in vv.2, 3, 4, and 5. The inclusion of the alien also occurs in 18:26. Chapter 20 adds punishments regarding these practices; this will also be true of the remainder of the chapter. Virtually all the sins have been described before. The new aspect is the nature of the punishment. Though capital crimes have previously appeared, the Bible here introduces the punishment of stoning for the first time. The whole community participates and therefore symbolically makes a statement that it has removed the unclean from its midst.

3 In addition to the punishment of stoning inflicted by the community, God himself vows,"and I will cut off " (*wᵉhikratî*, GK 4162) that individual. This involves separation from the community, its salvation, and its holiness. It is the punishment for rendering unclean and common (or profane) that which is holy. It occurs normally when someone or something is in a state of uncleanness and touches something from the sanctuary or enters the sanctuary (7:20 – 27; 17:4, 9 – 14; 19:8), but it can also include illicit sexual practices (18:29). As is apparent from vv.2 – 3, this act of cutting off is added to the death penalty. This is because the worship of Molech includes both the civil crime of murder, which carries the death sentence, and the crime against God of the worship of another deity, which carries the "cutting off " penalty.

4 – 5 God holds the community responsible if they do not punish the culprit. They too face the sentence of being cut off from God. The image of prostitution is applied to the worship of Molech, connecting idolatry with adultery (and the sexual sins of this chapter) — a theme seen in the Prophets as well as the Law (18:20; Hartley, 336 – 37). This theme of corporate responsibility arises from the nature of the community as the holy people of God. When there is sin, the community no longer enjoys fellowship with God because its holiness has been compromised. In the NT, the people of God are the sanctuary and its holiness. The uncleanness of idolatry receives mention by the apostle Paul because he advocated faithfulness and resistance to sin (2Co 6:16).

NOTES

2, **4** "The people of the community" comes to refer to ignorant masses in NT times. Though some uses suggest landowners or important citizens (Levine,

136), here the phrase may refer to all the people in general (Budd, 291) or a representative assembly with judicial powers (Joosten, 44).

3 "This is the first (and in the Torah, the only) explicit statement that idolatry pollutes the sanctuary (see Jer 7:30; 32:34; Ezek 5:11; 23:38)" (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1734).

3. Mediums and Spiritists (20:6)

> 6" 'I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.

COMMENTARY

6 See comments on 19:31. As in ch. 19, so here these practices should be associated with the veneration and consultation of spirits of the dead in order to determine the future. Here the connection with the laws regarding Molech reinforces this point. Molech is a deity of the underworld and of death. These practices violate the biblical understanding of God as the one who alone declares the future (Isa 41:20 – 29; 45:11 – 13; Jas 4:13 – 15).

4. Holiness and Obedience (20:7 – 9)

> 7" 'Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. 8Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
> 9" 'If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head.

COMMENTARY

7 – 8 In these two verses are summarized all the concerns of Leviticus. God

commands the Israelites to make themselves holy. The only other place in the book where God commands Israel,“Consecrate yourselves,” is 11:44, which concerns the proper foods to eat. Leviticus 20:7 repeats this because, as with the clean and unclean animals, Israel’s holiness requires distinction from the practices of foreign nations and adherence to a separate way, whether in diet, worship, or sexual practices. By avoiding activities that would tie Israel with the deities of other peoples, they recognize their God alone.

There is a parallelism between the final statement of v.7, “I am the LORD your God,” and v.8, “I am the LORD, who makes you holy.” Each has three words in the Hebrew: “I,” “Yahweh [= LORD],” and either “your God” or “who makes you holy.” This parallelism implies two things: (1) as Israel recognizes God through obedience and faithfulness, God makes Israel holy; (2) v.7 begins with a command for Israel to be holy, while v.8 concludes with an affirmation that God alone makes Israel holy. Behind this is the great truth of the Bible: the people of God cannot and do not fulfill the commands that God has given to them, and yet God’s grace is such that in the end he fulfills it for them. God says, “Do this,” but then turns around and assures his people, “I will do it for you.” The obedience to which he calls his people then becomes a means by which they realize holiness and actualize their life of grace in gratitude to their Savior and Lord (Eph 2:8 – 11).

9 See 19:3 for the command to obey one’s parents as a “hinge,” whether in Leviticus or in the Ten Commandments. Its function here, as commentators have seen, is to introduce the comments of the following section regarding sexual relations among family members. But it also relates to what precedes, because an Israelite’s understanding of God and his holiness first comes from his or her parents, who teach this in the home (Dt 6:8 – 9); therefore, respecting one’s parents first and foremost means following them in their covenantal relationship with God. To curse one’s father or mother is dangerously close to cursing God and to breaking off the family link that the son or daughter has with the community of God. To do this can only result in separation from the community.

NOTE

9 The breakdown of respect toward parents and their traditions leads to the

collapse of morality in other family relations, including sexual ethics (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1744).

5. Sexual Sin (20:10 – 21)

10“ ‘If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife — with the wife
of his neighbor — both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to
death.
11“ ‘If a man sleeps with his father’s wife, he has dishonored his father.
Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on
their own heads.
12“ ‘If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to
death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own
heads.
13“ ‘If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them
have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be
on their own heads.
14“ ‘If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he
and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among
you.
15“ ‘If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death,
and you must kill the animal.
16“ ‘If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it,
kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood
will be on their own heads.
17“ ‘If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his
mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be cut off
before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be
held responsible.
18“ ‘If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has
sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has
also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people.
19“ ‘Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother or
your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you would be
held responsible.
20“ ‘If a man sleeps with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will

be held responsible; they will die childless.

21“ ‘If a man marries his brother’s wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless.

COMMENTARY

10 – 21 Each one of these prohibitions has its parallel in ch. 18. It remains to observe the significance of the duplication of these prohibitions in the heart of the Holiness Code. Clearly, they provide an insight into the value God places on holiness in sexual relations. They also remind the reader how sexuality lies at the heart of the divine covenant not only with Israel but with all humanity as well. As Genesis 1:26 – 28 contends, the fruitfulness, multiplication, and filling of the earth by humanity is part of the divine will and creation order. Sexuality is the key component to realizing this command. It is apparent from these verses that neither the incestuous use of sex, which threatens not only to inbreed genetic traits but also to upset the role of the family and home in maturing its young and preserving its elderly, nor any practice of sex outside of a committed heterosexual marriage, can guarantee the proper use of this most powerful force in humanity.

NOTES

10 The adulteress here has been found guilty by a court; the one in Numbers 5 has not, and the punishment there remains in God’s hands (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1748).

17 “Disgrace” is a homonym from the Hebrew root ḥsd (GK 2876), which usually carries the meaning “covenantal love.”

20 Childlessness is, of course, a death sentence for the family (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Books of Moses* [repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 3:108).

6. Obedience and Holiness (20:22 – 26)

22“‘Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land
where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. 23You must not live
according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you.
Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. 24But I said to you, “You
will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing
with milk and honey.” I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart
from the nations.

25“ ‘You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean
animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by
any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground — those which
I have set apart as unclean for you. 26You are to be holy to me because I, the
Lord, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own.

COMMENTARY

22 – 23, 25 – 26 This section corresponds to vv.7 – 9 and provides an “envelope construction” that encloses the chapter with an emphasis on obedience and holiness. As noted, vv.22 – 23 parallel 18:26 – 30 in their focus on separation from other nations and obedience to God. Verse 25 resembles 11:47 in its commands to distinguish clean and unclean animals. Though this may seem out of place in a chapter that otherwise does not mention the topic of ch. 11, the command for Israel to sanctify itself and to be holy, already seen in v.7 and repeated here in v.26, has parallels of language (e.g., “sanctify yourselves”) with ch. 11 as well as concerns about holiness not found elsewhere in the book. Thus the two sections are related.

24 In the middle of this section on promises occurs a verse that has no similarities elsewhere in Leviticus. The first unusual form is the verb “to possess” (Heb. root *yrš*, GK 3769). It occurs nowhere else in Leviticus as an active verb. Its reference to God’s promises can be found earlier in the Bible (Ge 15:7; 22:17; Ex 34:24). None of them match exactly the same wording here, but they all affirm that a time will come when Israel will possess the land that God gives them. The phrase “land flowing with milk and honey” appears only here in Leviticus but can be found four times previously in Exodus (Ex 3:8, 17; 13:5; 33:3). Together, these phrases emphasize the close connection between God and

the people of Israel in terms of the covenantal promises he gave their ancestors and is prepared to give to this generation.

NOTES

24 Though "a land flowing with milk and honey" occurs only here in Leviticus, this expression is found fifteen times in the Pentateuch and four times elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Jer 11:5; 33:22; Eze 20:6, 15). It describes Canaan as having agricultural and pastoral abundance. A similar expression occurs in the Egyptian text of Sinuhe's visit to Canaan dating from the early second millennium BC: "Plentiful was its honey.. . . There was no limit to any (kind of) cattle" (J. B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969], 19b).

This phrase is especially appropriate to the highlands of Canaan (where Israel would settle), with its orchards for date honey and grazing lands for herds of cattle and goats. The phrase also appears in contexts that describe the covenants between God and Israel, especially as a reward for Israel's obedience (e.g. Dt 6:3; 11:9).

7. Mediums and Spiritists (20:27)

27" 'A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.' "

COMMENTARY

27 With v.6, the prohibition against divination by mediums and spiritists begins and ends the major section of this chapter. In addition, v.27 adds the punishment of death by stoning for anyone who practices it. This prescribes the same punishment as those who worship Molech through child sacrifice. Thus the attempt to consult the dead equals the worst practices of idolatry in God's eyes. Both require complete eradication from the community.

Verse 9 follows v.6 with an emphasis on respect for one's elders. Verse 27 follows a section whose central thrust (v.24) is the promises God gave to the ancestors of Israel. Thus the prohibition on mediums and spiritists serves a significant purpose as a frame to this entire section. Unlike the other nations, God commands Israel to avoid consultation, veneration, and worship of ancestors who have died. Instead, God commands that they should respect their parents while they live and should remember the promises made to previous generations — promises whose fulfillment can find realization with them insofar as they remain faithful to the God of their ancestors and parents.

REFLECTION

In a similar manner to Leviticus 20, the apostles commend Christians to honor and obey their parents (Eph 6:1; Col 3:20), to take care of their elders in their old age (1Ti 5:3, 9, 16; Jas 1:27), and to remember that they realize the fulfillment of promises that previous generations of the faithful could only anticipate (1Pe 1:10).

E. Qualifications for a Priest (21:1 – 22:16)

OVERVIEW

This examination of the qualifications for a priest divides into two parts: ch. 21 and 22:1 – 16. Chapter 21 includes considerations of mourning (vv.1 – 6), prostitution (vv.7 – 9), mourning rituals for the high priest (vv.10 – 12), marriage for the high priest (vv.13 – 15), and defects (vv.16 – 23). In other words, general qualifications for all priests are followed by restrictions on mourning rites and marriage for the high priest. Eight verses detail a series of possible physical deformities or injuries that render a man physically unfit to perform priestly duties.

The qualifications continue for priests in 22:1 – 16, verses that focus on eating the food of the sacrifices. They anticipate the remainder of ch. 22 and the instructions there for the diet and consumption of sacrifices. The concern for holiness before God becomes especially important for those of the priestly order who enter into the holy places and approach the holy God of Israel.

1. Purity (21:1 – 24)

a. Instructions for the priests (21:1a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron . . .

COMMENTARY

1a God commands the priests through Moses. The command to speak uses a different verbal root (,*mr*, GK 606) from that normally used for such commands (*dbr*, GK 1819). It appears only here and in 22:16, where it introduces rules regarding sacrificial matters for the laity. The presence of a chapter directed exclusively to the priests is unusual. Specifics about the sacrifices (6:9) and the high priest's responsibilities on the Day of Atonement (16:2) were also directed exclusively to the priesthood. But this section (21:1 – 22:16) alone addresses the priests exclusively with an extensive set of instructions.

For the Christian, the distinction of the priesthood and its special requirements call to mind those ministers of the gospel who also have a more stringent code by which they and their families live (cf. 1Ti 3:1 – 12; Tit 1:6 – 9). These concern marriage, but their focus is on the heart and the ethical and moral aspects of personal and family life that emerge from it.

NOTES

1a Does the fact that "priests" precedes "the sons of Aaron" indicate that these regulations have to do with the status of the priests rather than their function

(Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1795)?

b. Mourning (21:1b – 6)

> [1]b“Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: ‘A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, [2]except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, [3]or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband — for her he may make himself unclean. [4]He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself.
>
> [5]“ ‘Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. [6]They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the Lord by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy.

COMMENTARY

1b This command that a priest not allow himself to become unclean does not include the words “who die” in the Hebrew, but these may be added as a reasonable inference in light of the discussion that follows. Contamination through touching a corpse is the most dangerous and appears first. Because the sanctuary is the place of life —specifically, the divine life God gives to the chosen people — those who serve at the sanctuary are not to associate with death.

2 – 3 Then follows a list of people for whom a priest may mourn. He makes himself unclean by mourning for these people, but he does not sin by doing so, and thus his readmittance to priestly duties involves purification from the uncleanness rather than forgiveness for a sin. The priest normally also serves as the leader of his family; therefore, any who are dependent on him will be mourned by him.

4 In the light of this observation, it is surprising that mourning for all relations by marriage is prohibited. But none of the married relations, including the priest’s wife, are consanguine, and this seems to be the criterion for allowing the

priest to mourn.

5 This verse repeats the prohibition of 19:27, given for all Israel. There the shaving and gashing were related to ceremonies for the mourning and veneration of the dead. Here the text also forbids shaving the hair on their heads. This law places an additional demand on the priests that separates them in practice from the ceremonies for the dead.

6 This verse begins and ends with the phrase "they are holy," referring to the priests. This is because they present offerings to God. They draw near to the Holy Place and thus come close to the holiness of God; therefore, God requires from his priests an additional level of holiness represented by stricter guidelines.

NOTES

2 As in 19:3, so here "mother" precedes "father." The mention of "son" allows priests to mourn for these members of their family and appears to contradict 10:6, where God forbids Aaron to mourn the death of his sons. But the acts of mourning described there are forbidden for the high priest, though other priests could mourn for Nadab and Abihu.

3 For the Hebrew *bᵉtûlâ* ("unmarried," GK 1435) as "teenage," see Wenham, "*Betûlah*m : A Girl of Marriageable Age," *VT* 22 (1972): 326 – 48.

4 For some it is not at all clear that this verse refers to kinship relations by marriage. In fact, there is no word for marriage in this passage. The term "master, husband" (*baʿal*, GK 1251), occurs in the verse, but it does not fit well in the context, and any translation is uncertain. The LXX does not know of this term here. A variety of possibilities have been proposed, but it may be that this is a dittography for the following term, "for his people" (*beʿammay*m *w*, GK 6638; see Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1800). If so, the first three (Hebrew) words of this verse duplicate the last three (Hebrew) words of v.1: he "must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people." Thus this phrase forms an envelope construction for this section. But the text, though difficult, may be interpreted without this emendation as above (Levine, 142).

5 The prohibition against shaving may be related to the cult of the dead as a gift of one's vitality (Mil-grom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1802), or more likely, it is one of several mourning rituals in which the person separates from the community and identifies with the dead (Olyan, 616 – 17).

6 The expression "the food of their God" (cf. v.17) does not mean that God requires physical nourishment. Rather, "food" (*leh.em*, GK 4312) refers to the gifts of God's creation that God receives from worshipers.

c. Prostitution (21:7 – 9)

> [7]" 'They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God. [8]Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God. Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy — I who make you holy.
> [9]" 'If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire.

COMMENTARY

7 Prostitution and divorce are to play no part in the priest's family. The former sin, forbidden in 19:29, includes possible associations with the worship of foreign deities. Both it and divorce refer to the defilement that results from the broken commitment of marriage and the giving of one's body outside of that commitment. The higher standard demanded by God for the priests limits their possible choice of mates.

8 Like a refrain in the text, v.8 repeats the same ideas as v.6. Verses 6 and 8 bracket v.7.

9 The prohibition of prostitution for a priest's daughter may also relate to cult. Again, it brings into the priest's family sexual union outside of marriage and thereby connects that family and the priest with uncleanness. The punishment of burning with fire and its association with prostitution occurs in Genesis 38:24, where Judah pronounces it for Tamar's apparent act of prostitution. Leviticus

10:1 – 2 describes the fiery death of Nadab and Abihu for violating the holiness of God's sanctuary.

NOTES

9 The same root for "defile" (*hll*, GK 2725) occurs twice in this verse — once with reference to the daughter defiling herself through prostitution (M. Zipor,"Restrictions on Marriages for Priests [Lev 21,7.13 – 14]," *Bib* 68 [1987]: 259 – 67), and a second time when describing what the daughter does to her father.

d. Mourning rituals for the high priest (21:10 – 12)

> 10" 'The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes. 11He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother, 12nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD.

COMMENTARY

10 This is the first occurrence of the term "high priest" (*hakkōhēn haggādôl*, GK 3913, 1524) in the Bible and its only occurrence in Leviticus. Thus the regulations that follow pertain only to the high priest. The implication of a specific priest to serve as high priest has already been suggested, especially in Leviticus 16, where this figure performs the ceremonies on behalf of the nation. When Aaron and his sons were anointed (Lev 8 – 9), theirs was a unique experience. Afterwards, priests would not need to be anointed to their office (as suggested by Ex. 29:9 and especially 40:15; Milgrom, *Leviticus 1 – 16,* 555). But each new high priest would go through the anointing ceremony of Leviticus 8 – 9 (cf. 6:22); therefore, the high priest as "the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head" describes a unique individual among the priests, the only one in each succeeding generation after the first who has

gone through the ceremony of anointing. In addition, the distinctive clothing of the high priest (for Aaron, cf. 8:6 – 9 and comments) sets him off from the remainder of the priestly group.

The anointing on the head and the wearing of holy garments corresponds to the prohibitions requiring that the high priest not “let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes.” In fact, torn clothes and unkempt hair occur together in only three places, all in Leviticus: 10:6 prohibits Aaron and his sons from so mourning for their dead sons and brothers, and 13:45 also mentions the tearing of clothes and loosening of hair as means by which the person with an infectious skin disease designates himself as unclean.

11 These activities, along with entering a building with a corpse, render a person unclean; and the high priest, who enters closer to God that anyone else, must not allow himself to become unclean. Other priests may mourn, but not the high priest. This is true despite the implication of 10:6 that Aaron’s two sons could not mourn. This was because the two of them (and their dead brothers), unique among all later priests of Israel who were not high priests, had been anointed in the ceremony of Leviticus 8 – 9. No future priest, other than high priests, would be so anointed; therefore, the prohibition extended to Eleazar and It hamar but not to their successors.

12 Aaron and his sons could not leave the sanctuary area during their ordination period (8:33; 10:7). The oil of anointing was upon the priests. But 14:3, 38 assume that this does not apply to every priest, but only to the high priest who has been anointed. In addition to the practices just mentioned, the high priest cannot leave the sanctuary and risk encountering uncleanness that would then be brought into the holy places. Nor can he intentionally allow anything to be brought into the sanctuary that may be unclean.

Child sacrifice to Molech defiled the sanctuary in 20:3 (see also 21:23). Along with v.12 here, these three verses constitute the only times that the Pentateuch describes the sanctuary as defiled. General concerns for defilement occur in vv.7 and 9. Between them, v.8 affirms, "I am the LORD," just as v.15 does. Thus the text twice relates the holiness of God to the avoidance of defilement. Just as vv.7 – 9 deal with sexual matters, so also vv.13ff. consider this topic. The reaffirmation of God's holiness explains why the sanctuary should not be defiled. God's holiness demands that those who are near God must worship God in holiness (Jn 4:24).

e. Marriage for the high priest (21:13 – 15)

> 13" 'The woman he marries must be a virgin. 14He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people, 15so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy.' "

COMMENTARY

13 – 15 These verses repeat the prohibition against marrying a divorcee or a prostitute as given to all the priests in v.7. God again affirms that he is the Lord who sanctifies all priests (v.8).The high priest has two distinctives. First, those whom the priest is not allowed to marry broaden to include widows. Thus all women who have engaged in sexual intercourse previously are forbidden to the priest. For this reason it is best to understand the third Hebrew word in v.13 as referring to a virgin (*bᵉtûlâ*, GK 1435), despite its occurrence in some contexts where this meaning is not required (2Ch 36:17). This word appears a second time at the end of v.14, where it emphasizes the sexual purity of the woman.

There it is added that she must be an Israelite. This guarantees that no offspring of the priest and his wife would be taught the ways of foreign deities. It also prepares for the other major addition, namely, the concern in v.15a that the children of the high priest escape any defilement. Thus the highest standards of cultic and sexual purity are to be maintained by the high priest — a conclusion in keeping with the different grades of holiness between high priests, priests, and laity already noted.

f. Defects (21:16 – 23)

> [16]The LORD said to Moses, [17]"Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. [18]No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; [19]no man with a crippled foot or hand, [20]or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. [21]No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God. [22]He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; [23]yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.' "

COMMENTARY

16 – 21 Who among the descendants are fit to function before the Lord? Eleven physically challenging aspects to the human body exclude a person from participation in offering the sacrifices at the sanctuary. Verses 17 – 18a and 21 enclose the section in an envelope that mentions "defect" (*mûm*, GK 4583) four times and the presentation of food and offerings to God three times. Defects exclude anyone from this activity.

The categories of "defects" include only those observable on the surface of the body. Nothing is mentioned of internal ailments. The "blind" (<*iwwer*m, GK 6426) appear in 19:14 but in the context of a prohibition not to place a stumbling

block before them. The reference to “disfigured or deformed” is unique, though a similar expression occurs regarding sacrifices that are acceptable as freewill offerings but not in payment of vows (22:23). The hand and foot of the priests and of the healed person who has a skin disease are anointed with blood and oil (8:24; 14:28).All of these references may signify the use of hands and feet in the ser vice of God. “Festering or running sores” appear in 22:22, where they describe an unacceptable animal for sacrifice. Otherwise, the descriptions of “defects” are unique to Leviticus. Note that the word *mûm* also applies to injury or injustice toward one’s neighbor in 24:19 – 20 (Mary Douglas, “The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus” *JSOT* 59 [1993]: 3 – 23; idem, *Leviticus*, 46; cf. Kellogg, 438).

22 Here the text allows all priests to eat the offerings and sacrifices given to the sanctuary and reserved for priestly consumption. The distinction of the “most holy” food, which occurs only here in Leviticus, recalls the same Hebrew construction used to identify the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle (Ex 26:33 – 34). This and a similar construction of identifying the grain offerings, purification offerings, and reparation offerings (Nu 18:9 – 10) suggests that it is intended to include all offerings made at the sanctuary. None are “too holy” for any of the priests to eat. Thus the physical features of an individual do not create a sin that prevents participation in the sacrifices and offerings.

23 However, such physically challenging aspects of a person’s body may exclude them from approaching the sanctuary as closely as other priests. The Lord makes the priests and the sanctuary holy. This affirmation repeats those of vv.8 and 15 and provides a refrain throughout this chapter. Though physical wholeness and its correspondence to ethics and justice in the spiritual sphere seem reasonable, the text nowhere makes this explicit. In the final analysis, it is God who declares what is holy and what is not. It remains for the faithful of Israel to believe and to live their lives faithfully. The same is true for the Christian believer (e.g., Ro 12:1 – 2).

NOTES

16 – 23 The absence of moral and ethical requirements presumes that the priests possess the same requirements for holiness as the people of Israel must

have (ch. 21; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1821).

18 For “disfigured or deformed,” Levine, 146, follows Akkadian cognates and suggests “too short or too long.”

19 For “crippled,” the literal expression is “broken.”This may either signify a temporary condition (Budd, 304) or a permanent disfigurement because of the inability to set the bone correctly (Levine, 146).

REFLECTION

Though Jesus was the perfect priest (Heb 7:26), the NT nowhere explicitly recognizes that such “defects” render a person unfit for ministry. Jesus, of course, welcomed all to his table, regardless of their physical challenges (Lk 14:13, 21; Jn 5:3). But the NT recognizes the principle behind this list. There is a relationship between holiness and physical wholeness and a concern for the omission of anything that compromises that wholeness. The principle behind this is the concern for balance and a sense of proportion in the physical body; and this corresponds to justice, righteous ness, and moral purity in the lives of the servants of God. It is this “balance” of morality and ethics that the NT emphasizes in its requirements for ministers of God’s word (cf. 1Ti 3:1 – 12;Tit 1:6 – 9).

g. Conclusion (21:24)

[24]So Moses told this to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.

COMMENTARY

24 Moses has obeyed God.The responsibility to obey now rests with the priests and the Israelites, who have received God’s word. From a literary perspective, this statement corresponds to v.1.

2. Diet (22:1 – 16)

OVERVIEW

Chapter 22 divides into two parts. The first 16 verses address who may eat from the sacrifices and offerings God has given to the priests; it thus continues the theme of ch. 21. The second part (vv.17 – 32) considers the sacrifices in terms of the quality of the animals brought to the altar. Similar requirements regarding physical wholeness, already noted for priests, repeat some earlier laws.

The first section has two parts. After an initial introduction with a general command to respect the offerings and not profane God's name (vv.1 – 2), the first section (regarding the purity and wholeness of priests who may eat the offerings) is framed by general assertions of holiness in vv.3 and 9. In a similar manner, vv.10 and 15 – 16 frame the second section, which identifies who among a priest's family, friends, and slaves may eat of the sacred food. These commands further define what it means to serve God as holy. They demonstrate more clearly the unique position that the priests enjoy and the special responsibilities placed on them to protect the holy sacrifices that Israel brings. Using the commands in this chapter, they can determine which sacrificial animals are acceptable.

REFLECTION

For the Christian, this chapter demonstrates the holiness that God requires. The questions are no longer, Who may eat the sacrifices, or,What animals may be sacrificed? But the same call to holiness remains. Those who serve God and teach others will be held to a stricter standard (Ro 2:21; Jas 3:1). Furthermore, it provides the background for the apostolic demand that discernment be used regarding who may and may not partake of the Lord's Supper (and perhaps other banquets) and why this must be respected (1Co 11:17 – 34).

a. Who may eat the offerings: priests (22:1 – 9)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]“Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane my holy name. I am the LORD.

[3]“Say to them: ‘For the generations to come, if any of your descendants is ceremonially unclean and yet comes near the sacred offerings that the Israelites consecrate to the LORD, that person must be cut off from my presence. I am the LORD.

[4]“ ‘If a descendant of Aaron has an infectious skin disease or a bodily discharge, he may not eat the sacred offerings until he is cleansed. He will also be unclean if he touches something defiled by a corpse or by anyone who has an emission of semen, [5]or if he touches any crawling thing that makes him unclean, or any person who makes him unclean, whatever the uncleanness may be. [6]The one who touches any such thing will be unclean till evening. He must not eat any of the sacred offerings unless he has bathed himself with water. [7]When the sun goes down, he will be clean, and after that he may eat the sacred offerings, for they are his food. 8He must not eat anything found dead or torn by wild animals, and so become unclean through it. I am the LORD.

[9]“ ‘The priests are to keep my requirements so that they do not become guilty and die for treating them with contempt. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.

COMMENTARY

1 This common introduction first occurred in 4:1 and marks three sections in this chapter (vv.17 and 26).

2 The introduction identifies priestly concerns. It leads regulations regarding the purification offering (6:18 [25]), the proper sacrifice of animals (17:2), and the two major sections of this chapter (again in v.18).

The term “to treat with respect” includes an unusual (Niphal) form of the Hebrew root *nzr* (GK 5692). It occurs four times in the Bible in this stem, three of which include finite verbal forms (imperfect). Of these, one is followed by the preposition “to” (*le*) with the meaning that the Israelites consecrated themselves to Baal Peor (Hos 9:10). Where it is followed by the preposition “from” (*mēʾaḥar*),

it suggests separation from God (Eze 14:7). This resembles its use here, where it is also followed by the preposition “from” (*min*).Thus the use of this verb in Leviticus 22 implies that the priests must separate Israel’s offerings to God from the common food. This avoids profaning (Heb. *.ll*, GK 2725) God and his name — an idea also associated with immorality, idolatry, and abusing what Israel has dedicated to God (19:12).

The expression, “I am the LORD,” occurs many times throughout Leviticus. In ch. 19 the refrain marked off sections of the legislation. In ch. 22 the same is true. It occurs at the beginning and end of the chapter (vv.2 – 3, 30 – 33), as well as vv.8 – 9 and 16. It affirms the holiness of what God has received and warns against giving God less than the best or treating his offerings with disrespect. They are holy and belong to him. For the Christian, the offerings of God’s people in time, work, and money also deserve the respect of those entrusted with their care (1Co 16:2; 1Ti 3:3; 1Pe 5:2).

3, **9** The general principle appears first (and again at the end), before the various examples (cf. 7:20, where it first occurs). As noted there, “cutting off someone” is tantamount to the death penalty, except that God is the executioner. “Cutting off ” in v.3 occupies the same position as dying does in v.9. The priests cannot avoid all instances of uncleanness, as the following verses will demonstrate. But they must know when they are unclean so that they can avoid anything dedicated to the Lord, including the food of the sacrifices.

4 The first types of uncleanness include those bodily appearances and discharges, whether the scaly skin disease (*zr<*, GK 2446) of chs. 13 – 14 or the “bodily discharge” (*zr*, GK 2308) of ch. 15. The former symbolizes death, with the body’s appearing to decompose. The latter describes a lack of wholeness in the physical person, which corresponds to unholiness in the spiritual realm. In both cases uncleanness disqualifies one from priestly duties.

Corpse contamination was suggested in 10:5, where the bodies of Nadab and Abihu were removed by using their tunics as the means of lifting them. This prevented direct contact with the bodies. In 21:11 the text prohibited a high priest from being in the same room or building as a corpse. Such strict separation of the corpse and the high priest is ameliorated for the other priests. They must not touch the corpse, but they can be near the body of a dead person (cf. Nu

19:11 – 22).

The reference to the emission of semen recalls 15:16 – 18 and the description of uncleanness there. It also relates this uncleanness with those at the beginning of v.4. In fact, it all relates to concerns for life and wholeness as characteristic of God's holiness. Any generation of life-giving semen that does not produce life renders the person unclean, just as touching a corpse does. God is a god of the living, not the dead (Mt 22:32; Mk 12:27; Lk 20:38).

5 – 7 The prohibition against touching detestable creatures recalls Leviticus 11. Not only are detestable creatures unclean to eat (11:10, 20 – 23, 29, 31, 41 – 44), they are also unclean for priests to touch. The phrase "will be unclean till evening" occurs twenty-nine times in the NIV, twenty-six of which are in Leviticus. All of these, other than those here and in 14:46, occur in chs. 11 and 15. Ritual bathing (cf. 15:5) can remove the uncleanness.

8 This law repeats 17:15. Though the focus of ch. 15 was the prohibition against eating blood, its reappearance here suggests the danger that such food can hold for the priest. The law broadens the topic to include the priestly diet.

NOTE

3 The cutting off of a priest would retire him from sanctuary ser vice (Hartley, 355).

b. Who may eat the offerings: others (22:10 – 16)

> [10]" 'No one outside a priest's family may eat the sacred offering, nor may the guest of a priest or his hired worker eat it. [11]But if a priest buys a slave with money, or if a slave is born in his household, that slave may eat his food. [12]If a priest's daughter marries anyone other than a priest, she may not eat any of the sacred contributions. [13]But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or is divorced, yet has no children, and she returns to live in her father's house as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No unauthorized person, however, may eat any of it.

14“ ‘If anyone eats a sacred offering by mistake, he must make restitution to the priest for the offering and add a fifth of the value to it. 15The priests must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites present to the Lord 16by allowing them to eat the sacred offerings and so bring upon them guilt requiring payment. I am the Lord, who makes them holy.’ ”

COMMENTARY

10 – 11 The regulations limiting the food of the sacrifices to members of a priest’s family resemble those prescribing who may not eat of the Passover in Exodus 12:44 – 45: “Any slave you have bought may eat of it after you have circumcised him, but a temporary resident and a hired worker may not eat of it.”

Note that “guest” in v.10 and “temporary resident” in Exodus 12:45 translate the same Hebrew word, *tôšāḇ*m (GK 9369). Thus the offering to God of the Passover as the family celebrates the feast transfers to the offerings of Israel, and they become available to the priest’s family and slaves. Presumably the slave receives the privilege by forming a part of the household and being attached to the owner’s family in a way that other workers were not. For the direction of the Holiness Code toward banning slavery, see 19:28.

12 – 13 A priest’s daughter who marries outside the priesthood must not eat of the food because she no longer falls within the responsibility of her father’s household. But the daughter’s return to her father’s household after she is separated from her husband’s household, whether by means of his death or by divorce, allows the woman to obtain the rights of her father’s household and to eat the food offerings. There is one provision, however: she must have no children from the marriage. This suggests that any such “seed” (*zeraʿ*, GK 2446) compromises her complete loyalty to her father’s household. In such a case, her children continue the line of her husband, and his family retains an interest and responsibility in her well-being and that of her family. Compare 21:14 – 15, where the offspring constitute the rationale for prohibiting the high priest from marrying a widow or divorced person.

14 This text envisions the possibility that someone may accidentally eat of the dedicated offerings. In such a case, the reparation offering of 5:14 – 16 must be

used to overcome the guilt. This normally involves a ram and an additional 20 per cent restitution. But the requirement of the ram is replaced with a demand to return to God the equivalent of the food eaten.

15 – 16 These verses warn that lack of care when eating the sacred offerings could lead to desecration. In this case, however, the result envisions the need for a payment of restitution rather than death (as in vv.3 and 9).

NOTES

10 For "guest of a priest or his hired worker," Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1861 – 62) recognizes a hendiadys (the term takes a singular verb in Ex 12:45), "a priest's resident hireling."

14 – 16 The most sacred food can only be eaten by priests at the sanctuary. But the sacred food (crop donations, tithes, right thigh and breast of fellowship offerings, firstling) can be taken to the priest's home and eaten by his family. This latter belongs to the priest, and the offense is against him rather than God. Hence, there is no reparation offering but merely restoration plus one fifth (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1869 – 70; contra Hartley, 356, who sees this food as belonging to the holy things of the Lord, requiring a more severe penalty for the transgressor [5:14 – 16], and who, therefore, applies this regulation only to other priestly families).

F. Sacrificial Animals and Thank Offerings (22:17 – 33)

OVERVIEW

This section contains three parts. After the general introduction (vv.17 – 18a) come instructions regarding animals that God will accept as burnt offerings (vv.18b – 20) and as fellowship offerings (vv.21 – 25). Another introduction (v.26) begins a final section on slaughtering mothers and their newborn among

the sacrificial animals (vv.27 – 28) and a note on eating the sacrifice on the same day (vv.29 – 30). Chapter 22 concludes as it began, with commands to keep God's commands and thereby avoid profaning his name (vv.31 – 33).

1. Acceptable Animals for Sacrifice (22:17 – 25)

17 The LORD said to Moses, 18 "Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all
the Israelites and say to them: 'If any of you — either an Israelite or an
alien living in Israel — presents a gift for a burnt offering to the LORD,
either to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering, 19 you must present a male
without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be
accepted on your behalf. 20 Do not bring anything with a defect, because it
will not be accepted on your behalf. 21 When anyone brings from the herd or
flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a
freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable.
22 Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or
anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these
on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire. 23 You may, however,
present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted,
but it will not be accepted in fulfillment of a vow. 24 You must not offer to
the LORD an animal whose testicles are bruised, crushed, torn or cut. You
must not do this in your own land, 25 and you must not accept such animals
from the hand of a foreigner and offer them as the food of your God. They
will not be accepted on your behalf, because they are deformed and have
defects.' "

COMMENTARY

17 – 18a For v.17 as a marker beginning a new section, see comment on 22:1. The introductory command in v.18a is unusual. The phrase, "Speak to Aaron and his sons," does occur in 6:25; 17:2; 22:2; and Numbers 6:23, but only here and in 17:2 does the addition, "and to all the Israelites," appear. As in Leviticus 17, the subject matter involves animal sacrifices. This key component of the first half of the book included information on how the laity should present the sacrifices as well as on priestly responsibilities. The same is true with the

legislation regarding animal sacrifices in the Holiness Code. It concerns all Israel, but especially the priests.

18b – 20 First the text considers the burnt offering. This was the first offering detailed in Leviticus 1, but it is the first time that this offering is associated with the fulfillment of vows and with freewill offerings. Previously these were described only in the context of the fellowship offering (7:16). Cattle, sheep, and goats are acceptable animals for this sacrifice (ch. 1). Though pigeons or doves may also be sacrificed as burnt offerings (1:14 – 17), they cannot serve for vows or freewill offerings.

The requirement of a "male without defect" (*mûm*, GK 4583; 1:3, 10) recalls its appearance in 21:17, 18, 21, 23, where it illustrated the meaning of physical wholeness for the priest. This corresponds to a similar wholeness for the sacrificial animal. It describes the association between wholeness and holiness in the Holiness Code. For the Christian, Jesus was the perfect sacrifice without any blemish and therefore acceptable to God (Jn 1:29; Heb 9:14; 1Pe 1:19; 2:22; Rev 5:6 et passim).

21 – 25 The fellowship offering also serves for vows and as a freewill offering (7:16). Leviticus 22 focuses on the whole nature of the acceptable animals for sacrifice. There are similar cautions as for the burnt offering and specifics about animal illnesses. Verse 22 repeats material from 21:18 – 20 to describe these. Again there is a connection between the wholeness of the priests, the wholeness of the animals, and the holiness of God and the sanctuary. The text adds "the maimed" (*ḥārûṣ*, GK 3024) and "anything with warts" (*yabbelet*, GK 3301). Neither of these terms for diseases occurs elsewhere in the Bible, though the term "maimed" also appears translated as "threshed" (Isa 28:27; 41:15; Am 1:3). Visible deformities describe unfit sacrificial animals just as the deformities were used to describe unclean priests.

Verse 25 continues a list of unacceptable features. The reference to damaged or destroyed testicles recalls a similar disqualification for priests in 21:20. Verse 25 closes the ruling by repeating warnings about the unacceptability of animals with defects, corresponding to v.21. It also complements the introductory verse that forbids such animals from Israel's herds and flocks, and prohibits the sacrifice of such animals even if they come from foreign flocks. Thus the issue is

not the source of the animals but their wholeness (cf. vv.18 – 20).

23In the center of this section lies an exception to the general prohibition. Freewill offerings (*nᵉdāḇâ*, GK 5607) allow animals to be offered even though "deformed" or "stunted." The word for "deformed" (*śrᵉ*, GK 8594) occurs only three times in the Bible (21:18 and Isa 28:20, where it describes a bed that is too short to "stretch" out on). Thus a likely understanding of the phrase here may be "too long or too short" — in other words, animals that have a part longer or shorter than the norm. Such a defect does not achieve the ideal sense of balance required for sacrifices involving the perfect fulfillment of a vow, but neither does it call into question the wholeness of the animal as the other "defects" do. Hence these animals can be used for sacrifices that are freewill offerings, free expressions of gratitude for God's goodness.

For Christians the sense of the abundance of grace offered through Christ calls his disciples to respond with the "freewill" exercise of gratitude and an outpouring of love in ministry to those in need (Mt 10:8).

NOTES

17 – 19 The list of twelve blemishes corresponds to the twelve priestly blemishes of 21:18 – 20 in number, form, and chiastic structure.

24 If, as seems likely for economic reasons, gelding was widely practiced, the final phrase may refer to a ban on gelded animals at any altar in the land of Israel (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1880), rather than for any purpose whatever anywhere in the land (Wenham, 295; Elliger, 300). But there is also a contrast with the lands other than Israel in which such sacrificial practices took place (Hartley, 362; Budd, 311).

25 Though the "sojourner" (gēr GK 1731) may approach the sanctuary and present sacrifices for offenses (17:8 – 9; Nu 15:14, 30 – 31), the "stranger" (*nēkm ārm*, GK 5797) may not. He must send his sacrifices (Joosten, 76 [recognizing "from the hand of " as sacrificial terminology]; Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1881). Alternatively, the foreigner represents an alien source for the

sacrificial animal but a source that the Israelite offerer may not use as an excuse for a defective animal (Gerstenberger, 330).

2. Slaughtering Families of Animals and Eating Thank Offerings (22:26 – 30)

> [26]The LORD said to Moses, [27]"When a calf, a lamb or a goat is born, it is to remain with its mother for seven days. From the eighth day on, it will be acceptable as an offering made to the LORD by fire. [28]Do not slaughter a cow or a sheep and its young on the same day.
>
> [29]"When you sacrifice a thank offering to the Lord, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 30It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the Lord.

COMMENTARY

26 – 28 After a similar introduction that divides the text at vv.1 and 17 (see comment on v.1), the text considers the birth of animals that are to be sacrifices. It focuses on the animals born among the flocks and herds. No newly born animal may be sacrificed to God; it must remain with its mother for seven days. Neither may an animal be slaughtered with its young on the same day. Together these commands reflect compassion for the livestock of Israel.

As noted above, God limited sacrificial animals to those most familiar to Israel. Now the legislation further limits the types of animals. Not only are the defective prohibited from sacrifice, but also the very young and any whole family. As with other laws, there is a concern to protect families (Ex 23:19; 34:26; Dt 14:21; 22:6 – 7).

The introduction to Leviticus 11 affirmed these animals as fellow members of Israel's covenantal community. Thus the laws regarding Israel correspond to those of its animals for sacrifice. An Israelite male child was circumcised on the eighth day and became a member of the community (12:3). In like manner, a young male animal could not be identified with Israel fully and therefore function as a substitution-ary sacrifice until the eighth day of its life. Note that male animals are the primary concern of this chapter.

The prohibition against slaughtering a whole family of animals for sacrifice on the same day demonstrates the identification of the sacrificial animal with the Israelite offering it. The family was the basic unit of society, and only the worst of punishments would destroy the whole family (Jos 7). Otherwise, there was always concern to preserve the line (Ge 19:32, 34; 45:7).

29 – 30 The term for "thank offering" (*zebah*. *tôdâ*, GK 2285, 9343) occurs six times in the Bible. In 7:13, 15 (NIV, "offering of thanksgiving"), it is associated with fellowship offerings; thus this is a continuation of vv.21 – 25 and the instructions for the fellowship offerings. The command to eat it on the same day repeats 7:16. That principle affirmed the sense of fellowship with God. To leave the offering for several days loses its connection with the sacrifice itself.

But 7:17 appears to contradict 22:29 – 30. The earlier text permits eating of the sacrifice on the second day as well as the first. In Leviticus 22 the prohibition clearly limits consumption to the day of the sacrifice. If this is a continuation of vv.21 – 25, it places this additional restriction only on fellowship offerings used as freewill offerings and for the fulfillment of vows. The stricter interpretation of these offerings suggests that they represent ones given by offerers outside the regular pattern of prescribed offerings for festivals (Lev 23) and other specific occasions. In such cases, there is less priestly oversight regarding what happens to the portion reserved for the offerer; therefore, this ruling may have encouraged an efficient disposal of such offerings and a simplified process to guarantee that the meat is eaten on the same day, without additional oversight for a second day.

3. Conclusion (22:31 – 33)

> [31]"Keep my commands and follow them. I am the LORD. [32]Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD, who makes you holy [33]and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD."

COMMENTARY

31 – 33 This conclusion has a structure built around the threefold declaration, "I am the LORD," which occurs once in each verse. The text begins with imperatives commanding Israel to obey (v.31) and to avoid profaning God's name (v.32). It concludes with a review of the redemptive acts of God in sanctifying Israel (v.23) and bringing them from Egypt (v.33). In v.32 the key Hebrew root "holy" (*qdš*, GK 7731) occurs three times: "my holy name," "I must be acknowledged as holy," and "who makes you holy." The holiness of God is thus the concern of this chapter. Its obedience will result in Israel's honoring of God.

The central claim in this conclusion, "I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites," can as easily be rendered, "and I will be acknowledged as holy among the Israelites." It can be a command or a promise, and that point explains the structure of these concluding verses. They move from commands that God gives to Israel to promises of his work for Israel to make her holy as he did in the past (cf. 20:7 – 8 and a similar form). Again God's powerful, loving grace overcomes human inadequacy with an offer to aid his people and establish a relationship with them. The same is true for the Christian, for whom salvation and life are an adventure based on God's grace through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8 – 9).

NOTES

33 Warning, 80, observes the sevenfold occurrence of the common verb "to be" (*hay*m *â*, GK 2118) in this chapter (vv.12, 13, 20, 21 [2x], 27, 33). The seventh occurrence is tied to God's self-identification statement as Israel's deity who has delivered them from Egypt.

G. Cultic Calendar (23:1 – 44)

OVERVIEW

A cultic calendar in the Bible is a passage that presents the annual major (and sometimes minor) festivals of God's people in chronological sequence. It normally designates the name of the festival and includes details about the month and days when it takes place, the particular offerings involved, and other significant elements regarding its celebration. It can also describe the purpose of each festival as well as the requirements or expectations of lay participation in the event. Indeed, some of these festivals concern lay involvement, with few or no notes of priestly responsibilities.

Additional OT texts preserving Israel's ritual calendars include Exodus 23:10 – 19; 34:18 – 26; Numbers 28:16 – 29:40; Deuteronomy 16:1 – 17; Ezekiel 45:18 – 25. All of these texts are distinct in term of the details of festivals they present, but all provide basically a sequential enumeration of at least the most important festival periods: the spring ceremonies of the Passover and Days of Unleavened Bread, the late spring/early summer festival of Pentecost or Weeks, and the autumnal period associated with the Feast of Booths or Tabernacles. All of these texts list at least the spring and autumn festivals in that order. Some mention Pentecost and other festivals.

But Leviticus 23 alone among these passages specifically dates all three major festivals according to the month in which they fall. It does this either by naming the month or by providing the number of months from an earlier-named month in which a previous festival occurred. Both Leviticus 23 and Numbers 28 – 29 provide the most complete details regarding the festivals. Numbers 28 – 29 appears to focus on the details of sacrifice that are important for the priests; Leviticus 23 emphasizes the responsibilities of the other worshipers as well.

The lay concerns of Leviticus 23 are apparent from the initial instructions regarding the Sabbath (vv.2 – 3) as well as the concluding passage on the Feast of Yahweh (vv.39 – 43). Neither of these specifically mentions the sanctuary, priests, or other cultic personnel. Thus the calendar begins and concludes with festivals that do not require an official cult. This has led some scholars (e.g., Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 1952 – 64, 2036 – 56) to conclude that these passages represent additions made during the Babylonian exile, when there was no temple and no sacrifice was possible. But there may be a theological explanation, namely, that the calendar focuses on the holiness of the people and the concern to represent that holiness in the full variety of festivals and holy days, both those related to the sanctuary and especially those apart from it.

Given this understanding, one may divide the text into the following major sections representing special days and seasons: the Sabbath (vv.2b – 3); the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv.4 – 14); the Feast of Weeks (vv.15 – 22); the Day of Trumpets (vv.23 – 25); the Day of Atonement (vv.26 – 32); the Feast of Booths/Tabernacles (vv.33 – 36); other feasts (vv.37 – 38); and the Feast of Yahweh (vv.39 – 43). Verses 1 – 2a and 44 provide an introduction and conclusion for the whole.

REFLECTION

For the Christian, the celebration of such feasts may seem remote and irrelevant. But there is reason to suspect that these same feasts form the basis for the Christian celebrations that remember the death and resurrection of Christ (Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread), the birth of the church (the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost), and perhaps also the revelation of Jesus Christ as God at his birth (Epiphany as an extension of the Feast of Booths). The distinctive events of Christ and the early church infuse these time periods with deeper meaning and profoundly transform their earlier significance.

1. Introduction (23:1 – 2a)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Speak to the Israelites and say to them . . .

COMMENTARY

1 – 2a As with the previous chapters, the text begins with the standard introduction to a new topic in the Holiness Code, "The LORD said to Moses." In this case it goes on to describe that what follows is important for all Israel. Thus the concern of this calendar for the laity as well as the priesthood becomes important. The combination of these two clauses occurs elsewhere in the Holiness Code only at 18:1 – 2 and 23:9 – 10, 23 – 24, and 33 – 34. The repetition in this chapter further emphasizes how the material is written for the entire nation.

2. Sabbath (23:2b – 3)

" 'These are my appointed feasts, the appointed feasts of the LORD, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies.

3" 'There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a Sabbath to the Lord.

COMMENTARY

2b The identification of the Sabbath as the first of the festivals establishes its key importance in the understanding of holy days. It is the only such day that occurs every seven days rather than in an annual cycle. This is also the only special day among those listed in ch. 23 that falls under the category of "sacred assemblies." Though the term "sacred assemblies" appears here and describes the feasts that follow (v.4), the distinction of "sacred assemblies" becomes clear when one studies its nineteen occurrences. All but one appear here or in the corresponding calendar of Numbers 28 – 29. The single exception is Exodus 12:16, where the term designates the first and seventh day of the Days of Unleavened Bread. On these days Israel must abstain from all work other than food preparation.

In v.2 the term "appointed feasts" occurs two of the twenty-seven times that it appears in the Bible. In Leviticus it only occurs in this chapter. Before 23:2 it is found once in the Bible — in Genesis 1:14, where it describes the annual and monthly "seasons" marked by the sun and moon.

3 Verse 3 describes the seventh day as a "Sabbath of rest" (*šabbāt šabbat*m*ôn*, GK 8701, 8702). This expression is also unusual, as it designates the Sabbath at the end of the week (Ex 31:15; 35:2), the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:31), and the sabbatical year (25:4). It demands the absence of all work on such days, with the penalty of capital punishment for disobedience. This expression also ties together Leviticus 23 with 25 and provides an overall perspective on the formation of these chapters. They deal with the festivals according to the

sequence of their appearance: the Sabbath that occurs every week (23:2 – 3), the annual festivals (23:4 – 43), and those year-long festivals that are celebrated in cycles of seven years (ch. 25).

NOTES

3 The Sabbath rest was unique in terms of its division every seven days, its egalitarian character (with slaves as well as free resting), its use as a possible time for religious instruction (2Ki 4:23), and its basis for the sabbatical year (similar wording with 25:4; see Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 1959 – 64).

3. Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (23:4 – 14)

4“ ‘These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, the sacred assemblies you are
to proclaim at their appointed times: 5The LORD’s Passover begins at
twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6On the fifteenth day of
that month the LORD’s Feast of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days
you must eat bread made without yeast. 7On the first day hold a sacred
assembly and do no regular work. 8For seven days present an offering made
to the LORD by fire. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do
no regular work.’ ”
9The Lord said to Moses, 10“Speak to the Israelites and say to them:
‘When you enter the land I am going to give you and you reap its harvest,
bring to the priest a sheaf of the first grain you harvest. 11He is to wave the
sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to
wave it on the day after the Sabbath. 12On the day you wave the sheaf, you
must sacrifice as a burnt offering to the Lord a lamb a year old without
defect, 13together with its grain offering of two-tenths of an ephah of fine
flour mixed with oil — an offering made to the Lord by fire, a pleasing
aroma — and its drink offering of a quarter of a hin of wine. 14You must not
eat any bread, or roasted or new grain, until the very day you bring this
offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to
come, wherever you live.

COMMENTARY

4 At first glance this verse repeats many of the same ideas found in v.2, but it commands that Israel shall proclaim the feasts that follow “at their appointed times.” This has led to an understanding that these feasts may be proclaimed at various times according to the appearances of the harvest and the needs of the celebrants. There is more flexibility for the dates of these festivals than for the Sabbath (e.g., 2Ch 30:2). But the remainder of the text does specify dates in relation to the months on the calendar. Hence the potential for variation concerns the practice of intercalating an additional month every three years in order to maintain the correlation between specific months and various seasons of the year.

5 The Passover celebrates the salvation of the firstborn of Israel when the angel of death passed over Egypt and killed all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. According to Exodus 11 – 12, the families at the homes in which the sons remained alive followed the divine instructions of killing a lamb and placing its blood on their doorposts. The root behind the term Passover (*pesah*., GK 7175) appears as a verb in Exodus 12:13, 23, 27, and Isaiah 31:5 with the commonly understood meaning “to pass over.” This may be related to a homonym with the meaning “to limp, leap” (2Sa 4:4; 1Ki 18:21, 26). It may be that the occurrences usually rendered “to pass over” could be translated “to protect” (Mil-grom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 1970 – 71). The designation of the Passover as the fourteenth day of the first month agrees with the other calendars and with the original event (Ex 12:6).

6 This occurs in the first month of the year, the spring month designated either as Nisan or by the older Canaanite name Abib (Ex 13:4; 23:15; 34:18;

Dt 16:1).The term ʾābîb, GK 26) refers to the early barley grain that has not fully matured but can be eaten if it is roasted (cf. Ex 9:31; Lev 2:14; Jos 5:11). The early grain was available at this time in many regions of Israel, but the mature barley would not yet be ready for harvest. It is for this reason that the Feast of Unleavened Bread made use of the barley grain stored from the preceding season.

7 – 8 The first and seventh days of the Feast of Unleavened Bread correspond

to the beginning and end of the festival and the fifteenth and twenty-second days of the first month. Thirty-two out of forty-seven occurrences of “an offering by fire” made to the Lord appear in Leviticus. Seven verses of Leviticus 23 contain the term (8, 13, 18, 25, 27, 36, 37).Thus this offering (ʾiššeh, GK 852), whether grain or meat, especially concerns the festivals.

9 – 14 This section is dated in v.11 as “the day after the Sabbath.” Along with similar references in vv.15 and 16, this has been the source of controversy in Judaism. Does this refer to the Sabbath of the seventh day of v.8, the first Sabbath after the seven days of celebration in vv.4 – 8, the entire seven days (= one week) of Unleavened Bread, or something else? Milgrom (*Leviticus 17 – 23*, 1986 – 87, 2056 – 63) believes that originally each individual brought the harvest to a local sanctuary and that this day varied from one farm to another. As time went on, a regional sanctuary became the common center and the date varied from region to region. This date would become a Sunday after the last Sabbath of the preceding festival. At a still later date in the monarchy, with the centralization of worship, the command became fixed according to a nationwide dating scheme so that all brought their offerings to the central sanctuary.

While there may have been a centralization over the centuries, the view that the calculations of this date changed so much seems speculative. A similar calendar from the thirteenth-century-BC Syrian city of Emar also contains an ambiguity in which the date of a rite in the first month of the calendar is not specified. Instead, it occurs in the evening of a day during that month (Fleming, *Time at Emar*, 270 – 71 [Emar text 446, line 47]). There is thus early precedent in ritual calendars such as Leviticus 23 for ambiguity regarding specific dates of festivities. In both Leviticus 23 and the Emar text, the lack of clarity seems to relate to the uncertainty of the particular time of harvest in any given year.

The sheaf of newly ripened barley grain was elevated before the Lord. It symbolized the presentation to God of the firstfruits of the harvest. This was accompanied by an offering of a year-old lamb, flour mixed with oil, and wine. This offering to God at the end of the Festival of Unleavened Bread inaugurated access to the barley harvest for the Israelites. Before this offering they could not eat of the harvest. Thus it may be assumed that ordinarily the seven days of Unleavened Bread would be celebrated using what remained of the previous year’s harvest.

NOTES

4 The thirteenth-century BC cultic calendar from the Syrian city of Emar (text 446) is unique as the only cultic calendar of the ancient world (other than in the Bible) that summarizes various festivals throughout the period of half a year or more. Unlike the Ugaritic and Hittite festival calendars (B. Levine and J. – M. de Tarragon,"The King Proclaims the Day: Ugaritic Rites for the Vintage [KTU 1.41//1.87]," *RB* 100 [1993]: 75 – 115; Stewart in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2076 – 80), the texts from Emar and Leviticus minimize or exclude any roles for the king and royal family in the celebrations. Among other similarities (vv.11, 39 – 43), both Leviticus 23:4 (introducing the annual feasts) and Emar 446, line 1, preserve a title (Emar: "Tablet of the rites of the city"). Further, the third person frequently occurs in Leviticus 23 (vv.4a, 5, 8b, 9, 11, 13, 14b, 17b, 20, 21b, 23, 26, 27a, 29 – 30, 33 – 35a, 37b, 43 – 44; contra Hartley, 372) as it does at Emar.

Both the Leviticus and Emar texts begin and end in the autumn and spring (though Emar begins in the autumn), with special events devoted to the grain crops. Both divide the festival descriptions according to the months when they occur (see Hess, "Multi-Month Ritual Calendars"). For the antiquity of the cultic calendars in Leviticus and Numbers (possibly originating from separate local Israelite sanctuaries), as suggested by the Emar evidence, see also D. Fleming, "A Break in the Line: Reconsidering the Bible's Festival Calendars," *RB* 106 (1999): 161 – 74.

5 – 8 Various scholars have argued that the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were originally separate rites from two different groups of people (Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, tr. B. Menzies and W. R. Smith [repr., Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973], 100 – 108; Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, tr. B. W. Anderson [repr., Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981], 67 – 68; Roland De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, tr. J. McHugh [London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1961], 488 – 92; Brevard Childs, *The Book of Exodus*: *A Critical*, *Theological Commentary* [OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 186 – 94; Hartley, 378). Literary and canonical arguments have been mustered to criticize this thesis or to argue for an original integrity to the festivals (J. Van Seters, "The Place of the Yahwist in the History of Passover and Massot," *ZAW* 95 [1983]: 167 – 82;T. Desmond Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. R.T. Beckwith and M. J. Selman [Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995], 1 – 24; J. G. McConville,

"Deuteronomy's Unification of Passover and *Maṣṣôt*: A Response to Bernard M. Levinson," *JBL* 119 [2000]: 47 – 58; see, however, B. M. Levinson, "The Hermeneutics of Tradition in Deuteronomy: A Reply to J. G. McConville," *JBL* 119 [2000]: 269 – 86).

Emar 446 now provides evidence of similar festivals in which a lamb was burned and specific types of bread used, and there was no altar or priest (lines 78, 92, 105; Hess, "Multi-Month Ritual Calendars"; Mil-grom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 1972). As of the thirteenth century BC, festivals were celebrated by this West Semitic people using the essential elements found in both the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

5 "At twilight" (*bên haʿarbāyim*) is literally "between the two evenings." According to rabbinic interpretation, it designates the period of time between the first evening, when the sun descends below the horizon, and the second evening, when the last light of the sun disappears from the sky.

7 – 8 The contents of this offering, as for most in Leviticus, are specified in Numbers 28 – 29. See Numbers 28:19 – 24 for the ingredients of the daily offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Clearly this must have been known to the writer of Leviticus; otherwise, the priests would have been left to guess the particulars of the offering until the text of Numbers 28 – 29 was written. Hence it is certainly correct that the material in Numbers was known at the time of the writing of Leviticus, and thus the writer of this text does not include it. The reference to the seventh day as one of abstinence from work parallels the same text in v.3 and thus forms an envelope enclosing the whole of the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread.

10 – 22 If vv.10 – 15 are applied to the Feast of Weeks (vv.16 – 22), this lengthy treatment of 197 words in Hebrew has led to the impression that it contains an editorial supplement (Elliger, 307 – 9; Hartley, 373). But an unusually long description of one festival also occurs in Emar 446 (lines 22 – 40, where the text breaks off). There is no evidence there for a significant addition from a time long after the original composition (Hess, "Multi-Month Ritual Calendars").

REFLECTION

The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ occurred at the time of the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Christ came to represent the lamb sacrificed to God for the sins of the world, just as a lamb was offered at the Passover to remember God's act of redeeming Israel from the oppression of Egypt and claiming them as his own people. In a similar manner, the death of Christ is remembered at Easter as God's great act of redeeming the church of Jesus Christ from sin and making them his own people. One of the earliest "in-house" disputes in Christianity — the Quartodeciman controversy —dealt with the question of the date of the celebration of Easter, in parallel to the arguments within Judaism regarding the "day after the Sabbath."

4. The Feast of Weeks (23:15 – 22)

15“ ‘From the day after the Sabbath, the day you brought the sheaf of the
wave offering, count off seven full weeks. 16Count off fifty days up to the
day after the seventh Sabbath, and then present an offering of new grain to
the LORD. 17From wherever you live, bring two loaves made of two-tenths
of an ephah of fine flour, baked with yeast, as a wave offering of firstfruits
to the LORD. 18Present with this bread seven male lambs, each a year old
and without defect, one young bull and two rams. They will be a burnt
offering to the LORD, together with their grain offerings and drink
offerings — an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.
19Then sacrifice one male goat for a sin offering and two lambs, each a year
old, for a fellowship offering. 20The priest is to wave the two lambs before
the LORD as a wave offering, together with the bread of the firstfruits.
They are a sacred offering to the LORD for the priest. 21On that same day
you are to proclaim a sacred assembly and do no regular work. This is to be
a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live.

22“ ‘When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very
edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for
the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God.’ ”

COMMENTARY

15 – 16 The introduction to the Feast of Weeks places it fifty days after the Sabbath of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This is the seventh day of this earlier feast and the day after that, when the barley sheaf was brought. The command at the end of the verse is to count seven Sabbaths from the day of presenting the sheaf. The translation of the NIV is wrong here. This is not seven full weeks (= forty-nine days) but seven Sabbaths from that Sunday when they elevated the barley sheaf. Verse 16 specifies that this is fifty days after the Saturday that preceded the Sunday of the presentation of the barley sheaf. Thus the offering of the new grain for the Feast of Weeks occurs on a Sunday, seven weeks after the waving of the barley harvest and fifty days after the last day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

17 – 20 The main part of the offering (v.18) concerns animal sacrifices: seven lambs, one bull, and two rams as a burnt offering of dedication to God. These offerings, along with the goat of the purification offering and the two lambs for a wave offering, complete both the barley and wheat firstfruits. The designation of seven weeks after the Feast of Unleavened Bread positioned this second festival in the midst of the wheat harvest. But the success of the crop would now be clear; therefore, the Feast of Weeks would provide an opportunity to thank God for the rains and the period of growth up to this point. This would be symbolized by the elevation offering of the two loaves of bread and of the lambs (vv.17 and 20), which bracket the list of other offerings.

This time was a period of thanksgiving for the fruitfulness of the grain harvests and simultaneously a very busy time of actually performing the harvest. While there may be reason to question whether farmers would have had the time to go to the sanctuary and celebrate this festival, it must be remembered that this is a feast of one day and that the only subject specified during the activity of the event is the priest. The worshipers provided the offerings, but nothing is said as to how these animals and cakes arrived at the sanctuary.

21 The prohibition of work joins this festival to the Passover and the beginning and end of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. It is a holy time, and the day’s abstinence from work in the midst of the wheat harvest season represents the farmers’ sacrifice and faith that God will provide for their harvest despite their commitment to this additional day of rest.

22 This passage comes as though to reinforce the principle of v.21. God commands the farmers to leave something of their harvest for those who are unable to acquire food for themselves. This repeats the injunction of 19:9 – 10. Here, however, it reminds the Israelites that they do not work for themselves, but for God. God's concern for the poor must be respected and his ability to provide for the farmers must be trusted, even though this may require missing a valuable day of work during the harvest season and refusing to take advantage of the whole harvest. For the Israelite farmers, this teaches the dangers of greed and extols the principle of a generous spirit — generous toward God and toward one's needy fellows. God is in control and will bless whom he will.

The Feast of Weeks becomes Pentecost in the NT. Acts 2:1ff. describes how this feast became the day when the Holy Spirit came upon the people of God and brought about the birth of the church. Though the association of Pentecost with Israel's reception of the Law at Mount Sinai first appears in texts from the second century AD, it certainly involved a tradition going back at least to the first century. There are hints in the story of the birth of the church.

NOTES

15 – 16 Unlike here, other ritual actions are introduced by the preposition (*be*), the number of the day of the month on which it occurs, and a note of the month (vv.5 – 7, 27, 34, and 39); therefore, some scholars suggest a later editorial insertion at this point. But Emar 446 provides a parallel from the thirteenth century BC. Like 23:15 – 16, that ritual calendar also omits specifics (such as the day of the month of a ritual) in an intermediate month occurring between the two major festival months of the autumn and spring. As in ch. 23, in Emar 446 that information always appears with the festivals of the autumn and spring months. Thus this apparent aberration does not prove editorial work (Hess, "Multi-Month Ritual Calendars").

REFLECTION

Most important is the association of the Feast of Weeks with the dedication of the harvest to God while at the same time still gathering it into storage. What could be more appropriate than the spiritual harvest of three thousand converts at the birth of the church (Ac 2:42) — converts from throughout the known world (Ac 2:9 – 11), whose worship and ministry of Christ and his gospel continued the harvest (Ac 2:42 – 47). In the OT, Pentecost was a day of giving thanks to God for his life-giving gift of rain. In the NT, Pentecost became a day of giving thanks to God for his life-giving gift of the Holy Spirit, who was necessary for regeneration in the life of each believer and for a successful harvest of converts.

5. Day of Trumpets (23:23 – 25)

> [23]The LORD said to Moses, [24]"Say to the Israelites: 'On the first day of the seventh month you are to have a day of rest, a sacred assembly commemorated with trumpet blasts. [25]Do no regular work, but present an offering made to the LORD by fire.'"

COMMENTARY

23 – 24 The introductory language used in these verses resembles that of vv.1 – 2a, which are identical, and v.4, which also uses the term "sacred assemblies." The calendar moves to the seventh month, halfway through the year. The first and third months, in the spring, celebrate the barley and wheat harvests along with God's work of redemption on behalf of Israel.The seventh month occurs toward the end of the grape harvest and celebrates God's provision there. It also anticipates the rainy season, which will commence shortly, and seeks the favor of God to provide rain for an abundant harvest in the coming year. Thus it is no surprise that the trumpet sound (*terû<â*, GK 9558) that inaugurates this month has associations with the presence and power of God (e.g., Jos 6:6, 20; 1Sa 4:5 – 6; 2Sa 6:15). The sounding of the trumpet is often related to war but always concerns the work of God.

As with the Feast of Unleavened Bread (vv.7 – 8), Israelites shall "do no regular work." The special sense of this first day introduces the month as one that is reserved in a special way for the concerns of God. For the Christian there

is no direct correspondence. But it may serve well to remember that the presence and power of God are as real today as they ever were.

6. Day of Atonement (23:26 – 32)

[26]The LORD said to Moses, [27]"The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and deny yourselves, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. [28]Do no work on that day, because it is the Day of Atonement, when atonement is made for you before the LORD your God. [29]Anyone who does not deny himself on that day must be cut off from his people. [30]I will destroy from among his people anyone who does any work on that day. [31]You shall do no work at all. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live. [32]It is a sabbath of rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. From the evening of the ninth day of the month until the following evening you are to observe your sabbath."

COMMENTARY

26 – 32 This text repeats the responsibilities of Israel regarding the Day of Atonement as described in 16:29 – 31.It introduces two new items: the date of the event (Nu 29:7) and the punishment for failing to observe the commands to afflict oneself and to do no work. The time fixed is the tenth day of the seventh month. The command that any who do not observe this day will be "cut off from his people" describes a divine punishment already required for various acts of uncleanness, consumption of blood, and practices associated with the worship of other deities (7:20 – 27; 17:4, 9 – 14; 18:29; 19:8; 20:3 – 6, 17 – 18; 22:3, 24). As elsewhere it implies the end of one's name or remembrance among the people of God.

7. The Feast of Tabernacles (23:33 – 36)

[33]The LORD said to Moses, [34]"Say to the Israelites: 'On the fifteenth day of the seventh month the LORD's Feast of Tabernacles begins, and it lasts

for seven days. [35]The first day is a sacred assembly; do no regular work. [36]For seven days present offerings made to the LORD by fire, and on the eighth day hold a sacred assembly and present an offering made to the LORD by fire. It is the closing assembly; do no regular work.

COMMENTARY

33 – 36 As with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, this event begins on the fifteenth day of the month and lasts for seven days, with an additional eighth day. The first day and the eighth days are sacred assemblies during which normal work is forbidden. The contents of the offerings are not specified. They occur in great detail in Numbers 29:12 – 38, suggesting that, as with the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the author of this text presumes knowledge available only in the calendar of Numbers 28 – 29 (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 22*, 1350).

The reasons for the name and practice of this festival are not stated in this section (but see v.43). It is unlikely to refer to living in huts during the harvest, as that would already have ended by the time of the festival. But it may be associated with Israel's life in Egypt, where they might have lived in huts. Or it might refer to the site of Succoth (meaning "tabernacles"), where the Israelites stopped after they came out of Egypt (Ex 12:37 – 13:20). Finally, it has been suggested that it simply describes the huts that would have been set up around Jerusalem (or wherever the sanctuary was) at the time of the festival (D. Fleming, "The Israelite Festival Calendar and Emar's Ritual Archive," *RB* 106 [1999]: 31). Its timing associates it with the end of the grape harvest and the preparation for the rainy season.

REFLECTION

The Feast of Tabernacles alone is designated as one that all nations will celebrate in the millennial age (Zec 14:16 – 19). The absence of any explicit association of this festival with a Christian event, unlike the Feasts of Unleavened Bread and of Weeks, suggests that its full meaning awaits the future. Its early association with Epiphany may suggest that among the first Christians the joy of Christ's birth and the expectation of what the Son of God would do

paralleled the joy of the end of the harvest year and the expectation of the coming season of rain.

8. Other Feasts (23:37 – 38)

> [37](“ ‘These are the LORD’s appointed feasts, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing offerings made to the LORD by fire — the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day. [38]These offerings are in addition to those for the LORD’s Sabbaths and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the freewill offerings you give to the LORD.’ ”)

COMMENTARY

37 – 38 The summary statement that constitutes the first half of v.37 resembles vv.2 and 4 and thus provides an envelope to the entire summary of the annual cycle of feasts. The remainder of v.38 summarizes the types of offerings described, while v.39 envisions various offerings and special Sabbaths of the Lord that do not occur in Leviticus 23. This informs the people of Israel that their sacrificial obligations do not end with the festivities of Leviticus 23. They may supplement these with individual offerings for gifts and freewill sacrifices as well as vows.

Further, the responsibilities of the offerings for the Sabbath remain. This picture of many additional sacrifices and offerings may cause the Christian to reflect on how Christ has accomplished all that is required (Heb 9:6; 10:1). But as the comment on 6:19 – 23 [12 – 15] has already noted, Christians still have opportunity to offer continual sacrifices of praise to God (Heb 13:15). Indeed, the assumption of 23:38 that freewill and other offerings would be presented as a matter of course suggests that the expectation remains for all Christians that the giving of gifts to God and God’s work should constitute a normal part of Christian discipleship (1Co 16:2).

9. The Feast of Yahweh (23:39 – 43)

39“ ‘So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you
have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the LORD for
seven days; the first day is a day of rest, and the eighth day also is a day of
rest. 40On the first day you are to take choice fruit from the trees, and palm
fronds, leafy branches and poplars, and rejoice before the LORD your God
for seven days. 41Celebrate this as a festival to the LORD for seven days
each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come;
celebrate it in the seventh month. 42Live in booths for seven days: All
native-born Israelites are to live in booths 43so your descendants will know
that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I
am the LORD your God.’”

COMMENTARY

The designation of the Feast of Yahweh is unique in the cultic calendars. The term (*hag* [GK 2504] *yhwh*) occurs in Exodus 10:9, where Moses describes how he wishes Israel to go into the wilderness to celebrate. But its use there (cf. Jdg 21:9; Hos 9:5) is not clear, nor is the term necessarily related to this feast. The date and length of this celebration, as well as the commands to live in huts and to do no work on the first and eighth days, match the Feast of Tabernacles. But several distinctives do not occur in vv.33 – 36: the name of the feast; the use of branches and other products of trees to rejoice before the Lord; the specific command for native Israelites to observe the feast; and the rationale that the Israelites lived in booths when God brought them from Egypt.

For many scholars this is clear evidence of a later addendum to the cultic calendar — one that perhaps served the purposes of later generations after the loss of the Jerusalem temple (Noth, 166; Ger-stenberger, 348; Hartley, 372; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2036). But the appearance of festivals that occur at the same time of the year and have a number of similarities, yet that preserve unique elements, occurs elsewhere in addition to the cultic calendar of Leviticus 23. The thirteenth-century BC calendar from Syrian Emar describes a similar phenomenon in which two similar feasts that occur on the same days of the month are enumerated side by side (Hess, “Multi-Month Ritual Calendars,” text 446, lines 8 – 69). At Emar it is unclear whether these two descriptions were intended to refer to a single celebration or whether they were somehow kept

apart. Nevertheless, the structure of this ancient parallel precludes hasty conclusions concerning editorial redactions.

10. Conclusion (23:44)

> [44]So Moses announced to the Israelites the appointed feasts of the LORD.

COMMENTARY

The final note indicates Moses' obedience and the promulgation of God's commands. Moses is again faithful in passing on God's will. For the Christian, this is a challenge to remain faithful in proclaiming the word of God (2Ti 3).

H. Holiness at the Sanctuary: Lamps, Bread, and Blasphemy (24:1 – 23)

OVERVIEW

The structure of Leviticus begins with cultic regulations in chs. 1 – 7, pauses for enactment through ordination and discipline in chs. 8 – 10, returns to purity laws in chs. 11 – 15, considers the narrative of the Day of Atonement in ch. 16, once again focuses on legal regulations in chs. 17 – 23, and in ch. 24 concludes the cultic regulations (vv.1 – 9) before relating the narrative of the blasphemer (vv.10 – 23), which itself has an embedded set of regulations (vv.15 – 22; cf. 10:8 – 10).

The similarity with the previous narrative sections in the book reveals connections that may explain the odd combination of lamps and bread in the context of the unpleasant narrative. In particular, the narratives of Leviticus 8 – 10 provide comparison. Leviticus 16:1 explicitly relates to 10:1. The offering of strange fire (10:1), along with the grain offering made to the Lord and reserved for the priests (10:12 – 13), may be compared with the lamps of 24:1 – 4 and the

twelve loaves offered to the Lord and to be eaten by the priests (24:5 – 9). The death penalty for the blasphemer, pronounced by God, also coincides with the deaths of the priests in ch. 10. This relationship with ch. 10 explains the combination of regulations and narrative that occur in Leviticus 24 (Douglas, *Leviticus*; idem, "The Forbidden Animals in Leviticus," *JSOT* 59 [1993]: 11; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2082, who also compares chs. 1 – 7, which concern private offerings, with 23:1 – 24:9, which concern public sacrifices).

On the combination of law and narrative, note Milgrom (*Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2102): "The major priestly blocs containing law and narrative . . . utilize narrative to provide a specific case for the promulgation of a general law."

1. The Continually Burning Lamp (24:1 – 4)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Command the Israelites to bring you clear oil of pressed olives for the light so that the lamps may be kept burning continually. [3]Outside the curtain of the Testimony in the Tent of Meeting, Aaron is to tend the lamps before the LORD from evening till morning, continually. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. [4]The lamps on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD must be tended continually.

COMMENTARY

1 – 2 Among the occurrences of the phrase, "The LORD said to Moses," the first (8:1) begins another narrative section. This also begins Exodus 25 – 30 (25:1) and the instructions for the building of the tabernacle, the burning of the lamp, and the ordination of the priests. Verse 2 is a precise parallel with Exodus 27:20, which introduces the instructions for the lamp.

The purest oil was used in the Israelite cult for the worship of God. The word translated "pure" (*zak*m , GK 2341) derives from the Hebrew root for "clean, pure" (*zkh*, GK 2342) and appears elsewhere to describe either the purity of incense (Ex 30:34; Lev 24:7) or the righteous ness of a believer's life and faith (Job 8:6; 11:4; 16:17; 33:9; Pr 16:2; 20:11; 21:8). This reflects the twofold

purpose of the oil: to prevent impurities that would block the oil from the fire of the lamp and extinguish it, and to symbolize the righ teousness of God's people, who would appear before him at the sanctuary (Pr 13:9; 20:27; 24:20).

3 Exodus 27:21, with some rearrangement of the phrases but with exactly the same words and meaning, parallels this text. The priestly responsibility for the lamp remains forever. Just as the lamp symbolizes the word of God (Ps 119:105), so teaching Israel that word perhaps coincides with the maintenance of these lamps (Lev 10:10 – 11).

4 The permanent maintenance of the light of the golden lamps (cf. Ex 25:31 – 40 for their construction) before God represents the presence and revelation of God as one of light against all the darkness of sin (e.g., Isa 2:5; 9:2; 51:4; 58:8; Pss 4:6; 13:3; 18:28; 27:1; 31:16; 36:9; 56:13). This command contrasts sharply with the sin of Nadab and Abihu (10:1). Instead of unauthorized fire before the Lord, God's own pure fire is required. Yet the fuel comes from the people and their produce.

NOTES

1 – 4 The precedence of the lamp before the bread here, unlike Exodus 25:30, where the more sacred is mentioned first, has been explained by the rabbis as more frequently having priority in ritual descriptions (rather than prescriptions, Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2085).

2 Olive oil was the most common fuel in ancient Israel. The fact that the Israelites were to bring it to Moses reflects the sense that this was their oil given to them by God, and they made an offering of it to his sanctuary. So popular was this product that it became a primary export in biblical times. The later Philistine site of Ekron (Tel Miqne) possessed more than one hundred installations for processing oil from olives. The proximity of altars suggests that there was a cult associated with the manufacture of the oil.

3 – 4 The lampstand may have had a conical base decorated with a floral capital, on top of which was a lamp or bowl with seven spouts, as found at Tel

Dan (Zec 4:2). The lamp before the Most Holy Place symbolized the eternal presence of light, even in the dark of night, and thereby pointed to God's eternal life (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2088; Gerstenberger, 356).

2. The Bread of God's Presence (24:5 – 9)

> [5]"Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. [6]Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. [7]Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. [8]This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. [9]It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire."

COMMENTARY

5 The recipe for this bread appears only here. The use of two tenths of an ephah (one ephah being about two quarts) of flour has parallels in the requirement for some of the festival sacrifices that occur in 23:13 and 17, in Numbers 28 – 29, and in the grain offering that accompanied the ram sacrifice (Nu 15:6). The requirement of twelve loaves symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel and their continual presence before God.

6 For construction of the table, see Exodus 25:23 – 30. There the surface is of pure gold. But the term "gold" does not occur in 24:6 — only "pure." The table holds "the bread of the Presence" (*leḥem pānîm*, GK 4312, 7156) that is presented before God continually. The preparation of this bread is not described until now.

The two rows of six loaves each may simply reflect the practicalities of placing the bread on a rectangular table. But in all of Leviticus the number "six" (*šēš*) occurs only here and in 25:3, where it describes the six years of labor to gather in the (grain) harvest of the field before the sabbatical year. Interestingly, the only other occurrence of the term "the pure table" (*haššulḥān haṭṭāhôr*, GK 8947,

3196) is found in 2 Chronicles 13:11, where Abijah reminds God of the continual offering of bread on this table and the lighting of the golden lampstand as part of his plea to deliver himself and Judah from the attacks of Jeroboam I. God defeats Abijah's enemy and preserves the line of David in Jerusalem.

7 – 9 The use of a grain offering as a "memorial portion," in which the flour and oil are mixed with incense, occurs in 2:2, 9, 16; 5:12; 6:15. The most holy nature of the bread demands that the priests eat it in the sanctuary before it becomes moldy. This is clear from 10:12 – 13, where the grain offering must be so eaten; v.14 allows the meat offerings to be eaten by the family of the priests and does not stipulate where it must be eaten — only that it be eaten in a clean place.

This short section reflects the concern to present the most important element of Israel's diet continually before God as an offering. These twelve loaves remind Israel that all the harvest is a blessing of God and they represent a token of that divine gift that Israel weekly returns to God. The harvest is not an end in itself, nor is some other deity responsible for the harvest; rather, the Lord God of Israel alone supplies all the nation's needs.

NOTES

5 The "flour" (*sōlet*, GK 6159) was not barley (2Ki 7:16) but wheat semolina, which the rabbis regarded as the coarse grain or grits (not the "fine flour" of the NIV; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2095).

6 For the table to hold the loaves, they would need to be stacked in two piles, rather than positioned in rows (Hartley, 401).

8 The bread must have been unleavened in order to remain edible after a week (Hartley, 401). The weekly changing of the bread (1Sa 21:7) contrasts with the practice of Israel's neighbors (e.g., Hittites), who served fresh bread daily. For them the bread fed the deity. For Israel it symbolized a prayer to God for the nation and its fruitfulness (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2092, 2094, 2098 – 99).

REFLECTION

In the same manner as Israel was reminded about God's role in their lives, Christians need to be reminded that the source of their life on earth is neither the money they earn nor the work to which they devote themselves. As they return to God some of what he has given them, they affirm that through Christ God supplies all they need (Php 4:19).

3. The Blasphemer (24:10 – 23)

[10]Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. [11]The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) [12]They put him in custody until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them.

[13]Then the LORD said to Moses: [14]"Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. [15]Say to the Israelites: 'If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; [16]anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.

[17]" 'If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. [18]Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution — life for life. [19]If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: [20]fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured. [21]Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. [22]You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God.'"

[23]Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him. The Israelites did as the Lord commanded Moses.

COMMENTARY

10 The verb “went out” introduces this verse and section in the Hebrew text. The particular form of this verb (*waw* consecutive plus imperfect of *ys*.,), though common in the OT, has occurred only twice before in Leviticus (9:24, where fire proceeded from the presence of the Lord to consume the burnt offering, and in 10:2, where again fire came forth to consume the two sons of Aaron). Thus the third occurrence of this verb in Leviticus portends ominous happenings. The explanation of the Egyptian father has less to do with any value judgment about this mixed marriage. Instead it provides for a genealogy according to the mother’s line in v.11.

11 The use of “the Name” (*haššēm*m , GK 9005) as a circumlocution for God, so common in orthodox Judaism, occurs only one other place in the Bible: Deuteronomy 28:58. There it explicitly identifies the name with God. The act of blasphemy, no doubt an outburst in the midst of rage, is condemned in Exodus 22:28.The death penalty, however, is reserved only for the cursing of one’s father or mother (Ex 21:17). It might be presumed that the cursing of God would bring on a greater judgment, but no punishment is specified in that text. For the Christian, there is a warning against using the tongue to speak curses, whether against God or any human being (Jas 3:10).

The genealogy of the man’s mother raises the question as to the omission of his own name. The Sabbath breaker in Numbers 15:32 – 36, who was also killed, has no name either. This anonymity seems to reflect the judgment that such people are cut off from their family and nation. They no longer will be remembered and their names are forgotten.

12 The act of placing someone into “custody” (*mišmār*m, GK 5464) occurred previously with Joseph and his prison experience as well as his treatment of his brothers (Ge 40:3 – 4, 7; 41:10; 42:17, 19). A similar decision is made regarding the Sabbath breaker, along with the expectation of waiting on God to learn what should be done with the man (Nu 15:34).

13 – 14 The command to “take outside” uses the same verbal root (*ys*, GK 3655) as in v.10. The action of laying hands on something occurs many times in Leviticus (e.g., 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:4, 15, 24, 29, 33). But it always refers to an

individual offerer placing hands on an animal sacrifice (except in 16:21, where it is a live goat). Only here is the whole congregation involved, and only here is the object a man. For the significance of the placing on of hands, its substitutionary nature, and its identification with the animal, see comments on 1:4. The blaspheming has created a guilt in the community that affects all who heard it. Not only must the blasphemer be punished, but also the guilt of those who heard it must be returned symbolically to the responsible individual so that his destruction ends the impurity in the land.

15 – 16, **22** The narrative content of the preceding verses, especially vv.11 and 14, is transformed into a legal statute. What the blasphemer did and what is to be done to him become universal norms of conduct. This text initiates a set of punishments for murder and maiming that are described in vv.17 – 22.

17 – 21 Here is enumerated the principle of the *lex talionis* (lit., "law of the claw"), first found in Exodus 21:23 – 25. It forms a chiasm:

> A If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death.
> B Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution — life for life.
>
> C If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.
> C' As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.
>
> B' Whoever kills an animal must make restitution,
> A' but whoever kills a man must be put to death.

This structure envelops the whole with the demand of the death penalty for murder. The principles behind this are the prohibition against the taking of a human life outside the judicial process or war (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17; 19:1 – 13; 20:1 – 18) and the sense that human life has an absolute value and sanctity (Ge 1:26 – 28). Hence murder mandates an equally terrible punishment to reestablish justice and holiness in the land.

The death of animals requires restitution, presumably the value of a similar animal belonging to the one who caused the first death (Ex 21:35 – 22:2 [21:35 – 37]). The remainder of the laws establish as a general principle that everyone — native or foreigner, slave or free, male or female, rich or poor — is of equal value (v.22); therefore, there is one punishment for the maiming of another

person, and it is the value of that part of the body.

This is emphasized, as in Exodus 21, with the presentation of several types of injuries. Altogether, it demonstrates something unique in ancient Near Eastern law, namely, the fundamental value of the human person, regardless of status. It also creates the legal principle that such punishment is the responsibility of the official court of the land, not a privilege of vendetta. Within this there is the further postulate that the punishments prescribed here define the outermost limits of justice that may be extracted from a guilty party. Thus the loss of a tooth by a person of high status does not justify the loss of life by the perpetrator if he happens to be a slave. The punishment must be commensurate with the harm done (Hartley, lxii).

The principles of justice outlined here build on the sacred value of all people as created in God's image and anticipate modern justice systems where personal power or privilege has no claim in the court. Jesus' reference to this command is not to deny its validity but to affirm a spirit of grace and forgiveness in personal dealings between members of God's kingdom (Mt 5:38 – 42).

23 The conclusion of the narrative brings about the execution of the blasphemer through stoning. The act of stoning provides an execution that is swift (and therefore as merciful as any execution may be expected), and in which the people participate. In this manner, Israel as a whole affirms the justice of the act and wipes the sin from their national responsibility. The repetition of God's command in v.14 demonstrates with the same verbs and phrases that Moses and Israel did precisely what God said.

NOTES

10 – 23 The divine name here was used in a manner that dishonored it (Rodney B. Hutton, "The Case of the Blasphemer Revisited [Lev.xxiv 10 – 23]," *VT* 49 [1999]: 532 – 41).

10 – 14 Death for cursing God in the midst of a brawl has a parallel in twelfth-century BC Assyrian harem edicts that pronounce the same punishment for a

woman who curses the Assyrian deity in the midst of a fight (Milgrom, *Leviticus 17 – 23*, 2118 – 19).

10 The union of the term "the Egyptian" and the form of the verb "to fight" (Niphal of *nṣh*, GK 5897) occur only one other place in the Bible, namely, when Moses watches the Egyptian beat a Hebrew slave and the following day sees two Hebrews fighting (Ex 2:11 – 14). There is no clear relationship with this passage, but it does demonstrate that fights were not unknown among Israelites.

11 The name of the man's mother, "Shelomith," is more common as a man's name. But Israelites would think of the root *šlm* ("peace, well-being," GK 8966). The name "Dibri" is related to the root *dbr* ("word, thing," GK 1821; or perhaps "to lead"). The tribe of Dan, though criticized in Judges 17 – 18, does not have an automatically negative connotation. The one other Danite in the priestly writings is Oholiab, whose skill enables the building of the tabernacle (Ex 31:6; 35:34; 38:23). But the Hebrew root associated with "Dan" carries the meaning, "to judge." Thus the genealogy may anticipate the man's actions and their consequences as he overturns peace by speaking blasphemy and now awaits the judgment of God.

REFLECTION

There are two points to be learned from the punishment of the blasphemer. First, the power of cursing God, so common in modern society, should not be overlooked. God is not mocked and the principle remains that cursing God violates the moral order and profanes creation (2Pe 2:12). The consequences, especially for the Christian, are that the sinner does not enjoy full fellowship with God. Moreover, those who hear this cursing bear a certain responsibility for the sin if they do not intervene (1Ti 1:20). Confession and the blood of Christ are means to return to God.

Second, these punishments are the same for all (vv.16, 22). No one is above the law and no one can be excluded from it. God's law applies justice equally to all people. So did Christ, and this is what he calls his followers to do (Mt 12:20; 23:23).

I. Holiness of the Land (25:1 – 55)

OVERVIEW

This text follows directly from the cultic calendar of Leviticus 23.Whereas that text considered the Sabbath (vv.1 – 3) and the annual feasts (vv.4 – 44), this chapter expands the study to include the larger category of the festival years that occur every seven and every fifty years. Thus the sabbatical year is examined (vv.1 – 7), followed by the Year of Jubilee (vv.8 – 13).

The remainder of the chapter considers specific principles related to the treatment of people during this special year, moving from the milder to the extreme cases: (1) the general principle of leasing the land with the understanding that it returns to its original family every half century (vv.14 – 17); (2) the rewards of prosperity for obedience (vv.18 – 19); (3) the provision of crops for the years when there is no harvest (vv.20 – 22); (4) the general principle of divine ownership of all the land (vv.23 – 24); (5) buying back the leased land before the Jubilee (vv.25 – 28); (6) selling houses in cities, villages, and by Levites (vv.29 – 34); (7) the prohibition of charging interest to a fellow Israelite and mercy in debt servitude (vv.35 – 43); and (8) non-Israelite slaves (vv.44 – 46) and slaveholders (vv.47 – 55).

Rabbinic thought found here a progression of punishment for sin where there is no repentance. The unrepentant violator of sabbatical years will first sell his movables and land (vv.14 – 28), then his house (vv.29 – 34), and then himself, first to another Israelite (vv.35 – 46) and last to a non Israelite (vv.47 – 55; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2150 [quoting Midrash of R. Samuel son of Gedaliah], 2191 – 92).

This chapter provides for the welfare of all Israelites by prohibiting their permanent sale as slaves, limiting the wealthy in their acquisition of land, and protecting the poor so that their inheritance returns to them. For the Israelites, the inviolability of the land is a gift from its true owner, God. It preserves the single most important asset in ancient times, namely, the land that could produce wealth. It also teaches principles of mercy and the means by which private property returns to those who need it, without theories of wealth redistribution.

1. Sabbatical Year (25:1 – 7)

[1]The LORD said to Moses on Mount Sinai, [2]"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When you enter the land I am going to give you, the land itself must observe a sabbath to the LORD. [3]For six years sow your fields, and for six years prune your vineyards and gather their crops. [4]But in the seventh year the land is to have a sabbath of rest, a sabbath to the LORD. Do not sow your fields or prune your vineyards. [5]Do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the grapes of your untended vines. The land is to have a year of rest. [6]Whatever the land yields during the sabbath year will be food for you — for yourself, your manservant and maidservant, and the hired worker and temporary resident who live among you, [7]as well as for your livestock and the wild animals in your land. Whatever the land produces may be eaten.

COMMENTARY

1 – 4 The sabbatical year develops and alters the instructions already laid down in Exodus 23:10 – 11. There it is clearly modeled on the Sabbath day, as is evident by Exodus 23:12 – 13. In Leviticus 25 the similarities are based on common wording and organization. As with the Sabbath instruction of the Decalogue, an introduction defines the Sabbath (Ex 20:8; Lev 25:2; Dt 5:12) as a restriction of one's work to six days or six years (Ex 20:9; Lev 25:3; Dt 5:13), with the seventh day or year as a time of special rest (Ex 20:10a; Lev 25:4 – 5; Dt 5:14a), and it lists those who rest or benefit (Ex 20:10b; Lev 25:6 – 7; Dt 5:14b). The blessing of the sabbatical year is available to all because the growth of the untended fields and vineyards will be sufficient.

5 – 7 Though v.5 appears to forbid the harvesting of the after growth for consumption during the sabbatical year, while vv.6 – 7 appear to encourage it, Milgrom (*Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2158) suggests that the term "grows of itself" (*s$_e$pîah*., GK 6206) actually refers to the additional growth, arguing from the root meaning "to add" (*sp̱ḥ*, GK 6202).Thus this would be additional growth that should not be gathered in the year before the Jubilee (see vv.8ff.) but rather

should be allowed to remain until the following year.

Verses 2, 4, and 5 repeat the key point of the pas-sage: the land is given as a sabbath to the Lord. This sabbath involves an entire cycle of planting, growth, and harvesting. The allowance of fallow land will mark all land owned and farmed by Israel as special. Rather than an offering brought to the sanctuary, the fallow land will itself be an offering by which the Israelites will confess Yahweh (and not Baal) as Lord. Israel will worship God and reject a materialistic greed that seeks to wrest every possible product from the land. In this way the nation will also learn that as God has concern that the land and produce he created get rest, so he has concern for all Israel. This foreshadows the remainder of the chapter. For the Christian, the need to recognize that God is the owner of all and to avoid focusing on the material products of the world is a part of discipleship (Mt 6:24 – 27).

2.Year of Jubilee (25:8 – 13)

> [8]“ ‘Count off seven sabbaths of years — seven times seven years — so that the seven sabbaths of years amount to a period of forty-nine years. [9]Then have the trumpet sounded everywhere on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of Atonement sound the trumpet throughout your land. [10]Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you; each one of you is to return to his family property and each to his own clan. [11]The fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you; do not sow and do not reap what grows of itself or harvest the untended vines. [12]For it is a jubilee and is to be holy for you; eat only what is taken directly from the fields. [13]“ ‘In this Year of Jubilee everyone is to return to his own property.

COMMENTARY

8 – 13 Most Israelites might reasonably expect to experience at least one Year of Jubilee in their lifetime. The return of land patrimonies are proclaimed on the Day of Atonement, probably at the end of the day. The trumpet blast will signal an end to any debt servitude and leasing of land and a full return to the

ownership of the surviving family or clan whose inheritance it was. The principle of seven sevens completes the periods of time, from every seven days, to the festivals of the seventh month, to every seven years, and finally to every seven-times-seven years. Thus all the time units that the Israelites use to measure their lives, from the week to a cycle of fifty years, include specially marked periods within them that are to be devoted to God.

For the faithful, they will never be far away from remembering and serving their God. It will mean that each part of a lifetime will have a segment devoted to God in token of his gift of the whole of life to his people. In like manner, Christians have the opportunity to dedicate the whole of their lives to God (Ro 12:1 – 2).

God's design for Israel is to rescue all his people from the bonds of debt servitude and to guarantee each family land and a fresh start every half century. Freedom from crushing debt and possession of land, the basic source of wealth, provide a form of social justice built into the economic system that will guarantee most a fair opportunity in life. This is the prophetic "year of release" (Isa 61:1 – 2) that Jesus had in mind when he read that phrase in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk 4:16 – 30).

NOTES

8 – 13 There are hints from the language that activity appropriate to a jubilee was observed in Jerusalem just before its fall (Jer 32:7; 34:8 – 9; 37:12).The cessation of planting for two years (sabbatical year followed by Jubilee) is also mentioned by Isaiah (Isa 37:30 = 2Ki 19:29) at the time of Sennacherib's threat (Mil-grom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2257 – 70). This, as well as second-millennium BC parallels to the release (*derôr*, GK 2002) of debtors (cf. Akkad. *andurar*mu*[m]*; R. S. Hess, "Alalakh and the Bible: Obstacle or Contribution?" in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on Archaeology and the Bible in Honor of Philip J. King*, ed. M. D. Coogan et al. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994], 199 – 215; idem, "The Bible and Alalakh," in *Mesopotamia and the Bible*: *Comparative Explorations*, ed. M. W. Chavalas and K. L. Younger Jr. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 213) and other reasons argue for an early origin to this custom (Hartley, 427 – 30).

11 Understanding “for you” as applicable only to Israel and not to the sojourners in the land may explain why the Jubilee is not a sabbath: non-Israelites can work their land (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27* , 2152, 2171). Kings of other lands proclaimed general amnesties similar to the Year of Jubilee, but Israel’s jubilee is the only one in the ancient Near East fixed by divine decree and outside any royal control (ibid., 2163).

3. Leasing the Land (25:14 – 17)

> 14“ ‘If you sell land to one of your countrymen or buy any from him, do
> not take advantage of each other. 15You are to buy from your countryman
> on the basis of the number of years since the Jubilee. And he is to sell to
> you on the basis of the number of years left for harvesting crops. 16When
> the years are many, you are to increase the price, and when the years are
> few, you are to decrease the price, because what he is really selling you is
> the number of crops. 17Do not take advantage of each other, but fear your
> God. I am the LORD your God.

COMMENTARY

14 – 17 Because the land, God’s promise to his people, has been realized through the covenantal relationship with them, its allotment to the clans and families of all the tribes of Israel (Jos 13 – 21) is forever. Hence any sale of the land, as envisioned here, is in reality a lease for the amount of time leading up to the fiftieth year. This will be known to all involved in the transaction, with the result that the land will be more valuable the further away from the next Jubilee Year that the lease occurs. For this reason the statement of v.16 that “what he is really selling you is the number of crops” is true. Fellow Israelites should always treat one another with justice and mercy (19:18). Likewise, Christians are commanded to be fair in their dealings with those dependent on them (Col 4:1).

4. Rewards for Obedience (25:18 – 19)

18“ ‘Follow my decrees and be careful to obey my laws, and you will live
safely in the land. 19Then the land will yield its fruit, and you will eat your
fill and live there in safety.

COMMENTARY

18 – 19 The faithfulness of Israel will bring its blessing of fruitfulness. As the land so closely corresponds to Israel that it also requires sabbatical rest, so the land will bear a fruitful harvest insofar as Israel follows God’s commands. The result of the blessing — that Israel will live in the land “in safety” — is repeated to emphasize the value of obedience. The Lord God of Israel protects his people from danger and provides security.

This is the first appearance of the expression “live in safety” in the Bible. It will recur in 26:5, with the same promise of blessings. The security of the Christian’s eternal life is grounded in the promise of God in Christ, who will keep the believer faithfully abiding in him (2Pe 3:17).

5. Provision without Planting (25:20 – 22)

20You may ask, “What will we eat in the seventh year if we do not plant
or harvest our crops?” 21I will send you such a blessing in the sixth year
that the land will yield enough for three years. 22While you plant during the
eighth year, you will eat from the old crop and will continue to eat from it
until the harvest of the ninth year comes in.

COMMENTARY

20 – 22 God will provide for Israel’s needs when there is no planting or harvesting. This will be accomplished in a manner similar to the gathering of manna (see Ex 16:4 – 5). On the sixth day the Israelites gathered as much as they needed for two days, so there was no need to gather on the seventh day. Similarly, in the sixth year their harvests will yield enough to supply the people during the following sabbatical year. Even when a Year of Jubilee follows the

sabbatical year, God will supply enough food for three years, so that there will never be a lack.

As with the manna, this miracle requires no faith, since it will be apparent at the time of the harvest of the sixth year that enough food will be available for the following year(s). However, a temptation will be to gather too much and use the expected need as a pretense for greed. This was condemned with respect to the manna (Ex 16:19 – 20) and for the gathering of food during the sixth year. God's gracious provision of the manna in the wilderness thus has a continuation when Israel settles in the land. The principle of taking only what is needed continued to be taught in the early church (2Co 8:14).

22 Though grain and wine can be stored for the lengths of time described here, the "shelf life" of olive oil is one year. But when mixed with flour it can last more than three years (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2181, citing S. Rattray).

6. Divine Ownership of the Land (25:23 – 24)

> [23]" 'The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants. [24]Throughout the country that you hold as a possession, you must provide for the redemption of the land.

COMMENTARY

23 – 24 In other nations and lands, kings owned all the land and gave it to their favorites. In Israel, God owned the land and distributed it among the chosen people. Here the principle of "redemption" (*gᵉullâ*, GK 1460) of land is introduced for the first time. It describes the need of Israel to buy back the land that God owns. Israel does this as it uses its resources to guarantee that none of the land becomes owned by anyone other than the people of God (vv.25 – 34). The same term will be used to describe Boaz's redemption of the land (Ru 4:6 – 7) and through it access to Ruth as his bride. God's ownership of all is easier to confess verbally than it is to acknowledge in acts of tithing and giving that truly recognize God's possession (Mal 3:10).

NOTE

23 Hittite, Greek, and other sources attest that divinely owned lands may never be sold (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2189). It was, therefore, banned in other contemporary societies (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2193 – 94).

7. Purchase of Leased Land before the Jubilee (25:25 – 28)

> [25]“ ‘If one of your countrymen becomes poor and sells some of his property, his nearest relative is to come and redeem what his countryman has sold. [26]If, however, a man has no one to redeem it for him but he himself prospers and acquires sufficient means to redeem it, [27]he is to determine the value for the years since he sold it and refund the balance to the man to whom he sold it; he can then go back to his own property. [28]But if he does not acquire the means to repay him, what he sold will remain in the possession of the buyer until the Year of Jubilee. It will be returned in the Jubilee, and he can then go back to his property.

COMMENTARY

25 – 28 The redemption of the land that is commanded in v.24 is here made practical through a set of commands designed to retain all lands in Israel’s possession. Any fellow Israelite with the financial resources should be prepared to step in and buy back land that was sold outside the people of God to pay the debt of a poverty-stricken Israelite. But if the latter acquires the means to purchase the land, it should be done. This will be a member of the original family to whom the land was given as a patrimony. Failure to return it will bring about the loss of that inheritance and will destroy God’s provision for each of his people.

But since at Jubilee the land will revert back to the original Israelite (or his next of kin) who sold it in the first place, it is necessary to calculate the true value of the land in relation to its distance from the next Jubilee. Thus a fair price may be set for the loss of harvests that the first buyer will experience. Nevertheless, this buyer might take on a significant sacrifice in buying it from a

non-Israelite who has no concern about niceties such as the Year of Jubilee. Such a sense of sacrifice for another's welfare deserves consideration. It provides a background for the principle that those who have wealth give it to the poor — a principle with which Jesus, in at least once instance, challenged a wealthy young man (Lk 18:18 – 30).

8. Selling Houses (25:29 – 34)

> 29“ ‘If a man sells a house in a walled city, he retains the right of redemption a full year after its sale. During that time he may redeem it. 30If it is not redeemed before a full year has passed, the house in the walled city shall belong permanently to the buyer and his descendants. It is not to be returned in the Jubilee. 31But houses in villages without walls around them are to be considered as open country. They can be redeemed, and they are to be returned in the Jubilee.
>
> 32“ ‘The Levites always have the right to redeem their houses in the Levitical towns, which they possess. 33So the property of the Levites is redeemable — that is, a house sold in any town they hold — and is to be returned in the Jubilee, because the houses in the towns of the Levites are their property among the Israelites. 34But the pastureland belonging to their towns must not be sold; it is their permanent possession.

COMMENTARY

29 – 30 The text considers several categories of property not included under the general category of fields, vineyards, and the like discussed thus far. First, houses in walled cities are not returnable at the Year of Jubilee. This is first of all because the patrimonies given to Israelite families and clans are not urban but agrarian; therefore, such dwellings will have been purchased in addition to the family property. Further, their presence in a walled city suggests a locus in the context of limited space as well as the privilege of greater security. Thus they represent luxuries for early Israel. The one-year date for the option of redeeming the property may imply a recognition that at least in some cases this will become the only property of a (displaced?) Israelite. Hence, to ensure against the eventuality that such a person cannot find another place to live, there is a year's

allowance to buy it back. The same may be true for those mercantile Israelites who will leave the country for long periods of time.

31 Village dwellings are different because they normally lie attached or close to the patrimonial estates. Indeed, they may have been part of these estates. This is illustrated by the eighth-century BC Samaria ostraca, where the names of villages match the names of individuals in the book of Joshua who were allotted lands in this region. Thus the villages housed the families of these same ancestors who received the property as their inheritance. The sale of family homes in such a village will be the equivalent of the sale of part of the patrimony.

32 – 34 The Levites (only mentioned here in Leviticus) will receive no inheritance except for the cities in which they live (Jos 21). Their patrimony is limited to urban dwellings (and districts around the city) that cannot be taken from them. In fact, unique in Israel, the Levites are forbidden to sell their "pastureland" (or "districts" [*migraš*, GK 4494]; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2203 – 4 renders the word as "livestock enclosures"), even given the law of the Year of Jubilee. These lands are guaranteed to the Levites and are protected. They can never be traded away to other tribes or outside the land.

NOTE

34 For the Levitical allotments and their adjacent territories, see Hess, *Joshua*, 280 – 81. A town list occurs in land grants from Alalakh (and third millennium texts; I. Yoda, "Tips for Leviticus from Mesopo-tamia: On Debts Resulting in Enslavement," *Exeg* 10 [1999]: 65 – 76). One text (AT 56) describes towns that are given "with their districts," just as in Joshua 21 the towns are given with their pasturelands (R. S. Hess, "A Typology of West Semitic Place Name Lists with Special Reference to Joshua 13 – 19," *BA* 59, no. 3 [September 1996]: 160 – 70). For the translation of the biblical term for "pasturelands" as "districts," see James Barr, "*migraš* in the Old Testament," *JSS* 29 (1984): 15 – 31.

Many of the Levitical towns were previously Canaanite and lay on the borders of tribal lands. This suggests that they were designed to allow the Levites centers for the preservation and dissemination of the faith and culture of Israel. J.

Peterson (“A Topographical Surface Survey of the Levitical ‘Cities’ of Joshua 21 and 1 Chronicles 6” [Ph.D. diss., Chicago Institute of Advanced Theological Studies, 1977]) uses the expression, “Yahweh teaching centers.”

9. Debt Slavery (25:35 – 43)

35“ ‘If one of your countrymen becomes poor and is unable to support
himself among you, help him as you would an alien or a temporary
resident, so he can continue to live among you. 36Do not take interest of any
kind from him, but fear your God, so that your countryman may continue to
live among you. 37You must not lend him money at interest or sell him food
at a profit. 38I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt to
give you the land of Canaan and to be your God.
39“ ‘If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells
himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40He is to be treated as a
hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until
the Year of Jubilee. 41Then he and his children are to be released, and he
will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers.
42Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they
must not be sold as slaves. 43Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your
God.

COMMENTARY

35 – 43 The merciful concern and sacrificial care of poor Israelites by their kin has already been implied in this chapter. Here it is underscored with the prohibition of interest (vv.36 – 38) and the recognition that debt servitude does not constitute slavery but hired labor for a limited period of time (vv.39 – 43).The prohibition of “interest” (lit.,“bite,” *nešek* , GK 5968) develops the law of Exodus 22:25 and anticipates Deuteronomy 23:19 – 20. Israelite debt servitude is described in the laws concerning the Year of Jubilee (vv.8 – 13).The return of the land that is leased parallels the freedom of those whose labor has also been sold to pay debts. In every case the concern of these laws is to prevent abuse of one Israelite by another and to promote the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (19:18).

NOTES

36 Charging interest is forbidden in the OT (Ex 22:24; Dt 23:20 – 21). Elsewhere in the ancient world it was permitted, and rates as high as 60 per cent were not unknown (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2209).

39 – 54 G. C. Chirichigno (*Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* [JSOTSup 141; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993]) maintains that the type of servitude described here differs from that in Exodus 21:2 – 11 and Deuteronomy 15:12 – 18. Hence, these laws could all function at the same time.

40 In Israel indentured laborers could work off the principal of their debt, whereas in Mesopotamia they worked off the interest only (though time limitations of up to fifty years were imposed). Israelites were not slaves without rights, and even if the debt was large, they had the expectation of the Jubilee release (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2223 – 24).

43 The root for ruling "ruthlessly" (*prk*, GK 7266) means "to grind" and here "describes toil that breaks the body and grinds down the spirit" (Hartley, 441).

10. Non-Israelite Slaves (25:44 – 46)

> 44"'Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. 45You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. 46You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.

COMMENTARY

44 – 46 This text makes a radical distinction between Israelites and those

outside the covenant faith. The latter may be treated as slaves just as other nations treat slaves. They can be bought, sold, and passed on as part of the household property. They and their families have no rights in Israel. Why did God allow such slavery? Is this accommodation to the practices of the surrounding nations? If so, how does one draw the line between what is cultural and what is essential to the faith? Clearly there are few practices as abhorrent to the modern mind as slavery. In earlier periods, Christians sometimes led the fight to ban it; nevertheless, this text implies that it is acceptable.

But a closer reading reveals at least two qualifications. First, as noted in 19:26 – 28, the prohibition against placing marks on the body contradicts the requirement that all permanent slaves be so marked (Ex 21:6; Dt 15:17) and renders slaveholding impossible for Israelites (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27* , 2214). Full obedience of the Levitical law will pull away from the practice of keeping slaves. Second, Christians must understand that the picture in the NT is one in which the barriers between nations have been broken down (Eph 2:11 – 22) and the traditional distinctions of status have been nullified (Gal 3:28). Thus the process by which the vestiges of slavery became abolished were initiated in the OT and achieved their full flowering in the NT with the abolition of those same distinctions that Leviticus 25 mandated as necessary.

11. Slave Holders (25:47 – 55)

47“ ‘If an alien or a temporary resident among you becomes rich and one
of your countrymen becomes poor and sells himself to the alien living
among you or to a member of the alien’s clan, 48he retains the right of
redemption after he has sold himself. One of his relatives may redeem him:
49An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in his clan may redeem him. Or
if he prospers, he may redeem himself. 50He and his buyer are to count the
time from the year he sold himself up to the Year of Jubilee. The price for
his release is to be based on the rate paid to a hired man for that number of
years. 51If many years remain, he must pay for his redemption a larger share
of the price paid for him. 52If only a few years remain until the Year of
Jubilee, he is to compute that and pay for his redemption accordingly. 53He
is to be treated as a man hired from year to year; you must see to it that his
owner does not rule over him ruthlessly.

54“ ‘Even if he is not redeemed in any of these ways, he and his children are to be released in the Year of Jubilee, 55for the Israelites belong to me as servants. They are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

COMMENTARY

47 – 55 The final section considers an Israelite sold into debt servitude to an alien or sojourner residing in the land of Israel. Such a person has no ties of kinship or perhaps even of religion (though cf. 16:29; 17:8 – 10). Yet they will be responsible to treat this slave just as other Israelites did when they bought their fellow Israelite’s labor (vv.8 – 13, 35 – 43). The Israelite will always be liable to redemption by a kin at a fair price. This must be calculated with the understanding that, whatever happens, the servitude will end at the Year of Jubilee. Though the same principles have previously been described, their greater detail here may reflect a concern to guarantee that the Israelite receives proper treatment at the hands of a foreigner despite the desperate condition of debt servitude.

It is worthwhile reflecting that the first set of civil laws in the earliest collection, the Book of the Covenant, describes the treatment of Israelite slaves (Ex 21:1 – 11). Rabbinic thought wisely suggested that this was because God wished to define most closely those laws respecting those most vulnerable in society. Thus the command to love one’s neighbor extended first to those most likely to be forgotten — the slaves. The same is true of Leviticus 25. It describes not only God’s concern for the land and how the sabbatical and Jubilee years provide rest for it, but it also expresses concern for those on the lowest rung of society and how the message of God’s love for all of his people includes especially the most vulnerable in society. Note how Christ ministered to those who were physically needy as well as spiritually impoverished, and this should remain a priority for his disciples (Lk 4:18).

NOTE

54 The verb “go free” (*yāṣāʾ*, GK 3655) is used of God’s bringing of Israel out

of Egypt to free the people from slavery (Ex 20:2; Dt 5:6; Robert Hubbard Jr., “The Go,el in Ancient Israel: Theological Reflections on an Israelite Institution,” *BBR* 1 [1991]: 11).

J. Blessings and Curses (26:1 – 46)

OVERVIEW

The use of blessings and curses is customary in ancient Near Eastern law codes and treaties as well as in biblical covenants (contra Gerstenberger, 410 – 12, who wishes to assign them to two independent sources). In the ancient world, the Code of Hammurabi contains a section following the legal clauses that advocates blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (col. xlviii, line 59 – col. li, line 91; Roth, 135 – 40). Similarly, the Late Bronze Age treaty between Murshili I of the Hittites and Duppi-Teshub of Amurru includes a section following the stipulations and list of divine witnesses where curses appear first, followed by blessings (A, col. iv., lines 21 – 32; I. Singer in W. W. Hallo and K. L.Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture* [Leiden: Brill, 2001], 2:98). In the OT see especially Deuteronomy 28:1 – 14 for the blessings and 28:15 – 68 for the curses.

Blessings and curses are also found in Leviticus 26, where they follow the legal stipulations of the holiness laws. The order — blessings followed by curses — matches that of the law code of Hammurabi and of Deuteronomy but not the treaties. Thus, Leviticus 17 – 26 resembles a law collection, not a treaty. As is always the case, the blessings are generalizations and are shorter than the list of curses, which are specific and more frightening (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2287). Only documents from the second millennium BC (and earlier) show clear evidence of both blessings and curses. First millennium legal collections, such as the Neo-Babylonian laws (Roth, 143 – 49), as well as first millennium treaties, such as the Neo-Assyrian ones (Parpola and Watanabe, xxxv, xli – xlii), do not possess these two elements.

From this it may be concluded that the appearance of blessings and curses at

the end of a series of legal stipulations would have been an expected literary form for Israelites of the late second millennium BC, but there are modifications to the form. The initial two verses of the chapter reaffirm laws against idolatry and exhort the keeping of the Sabbath. Verses 3 – 13 describe the blessings for faithfulness. Verses 14 – 39 describe the curses for disobedience.

But this is not merely a listing. As in 25:14 – 55, where the debtor's condition was described in stages that progressively worsened, so in vv.14 – 39 there is a series of increasingly severe punishments as the sins become greater (vv.14 – 17, 18 – 20, 21 – 22, 23 – 26, 27 – 39). The most dire of circumstances is then followed by God's mercy and forgiveness if Israel should repent (vv.40 – 43) and by his promise to remain faithful to the covenant (vv.44 – 45). The chapter ends with the concluding note in v.46.

1. Idolatry, Sabbaths, and Sanctuary (26:1 – 2)

1“ ‘Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves,
and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the
LORD your God.
2“ ‘Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the
Lord.

COMMENTARY

1 The command against idolatry uses four terms to describe the images that are forbidden: “idol” (ʾelîl, GK 496), “image” (*pesel*, GK 7181), “sacred stone” (maṣṣēbâ, GK 5167), and “carved stone” (ʾeben maśkît, GK 74, 5381). “Idol” is found previously only in 19:4, which also forbids its erection. “Image” occurs in the Decalogue (Ex 20:4) as the word used to prohibit the worship of other deities in the form of anything in nature. “Sacred stone” appears as an idolatrous object previously only in Exodus 23:24, but it will be used repeatedly in Deuteronomy to forbid idolatry (7:5; 12:3; 16:22). The “carved stone” is a unique term used only here. Though these objects are found in the land in which Israel will settle, they were also present in the wilderness, where Israel remained for an entire generation (U. Avner, “Sacred Stones in the Desert,” *BAR* 27, no. 3 [May/June 2001]: 30 – 41).

2 The command to keep the Sabbaths offers reminders to the reader of Leviticus 23 and 25, where the various festivals and days of rest appeared. The proper attitude toward God’s sanctuary reviews Leviticus 1 – 10; 16 before the Holiness Code (chs.17 – . It describes the whole set of ceremonies and sacrifices.

What is the purpose and relationship of these two commands, placed here at the beginning of a chapter dealing with blessings? Verses 2 – 3 of ch. 19 also juxtapose commands regarding the Sabbath and idolatry, as does the Decalogue (Ex 20:4 – 6, 8 – 11; Dt 5:7 – 10, 12 – 15). But nowhere else do they include a command to revere the sanctuary. This is not accidental. The command against images recognizes that God cannot receive worship through an image, because no created thing can properly image God, other than people, who are created in

God's image (Ge 1:26 – 28). Verse 2 here asserts that the Sabbath observances and the sanctuary of God provide appropriate substitutes for images. They are divinely commanded and provide means for every Israelite to serve God as well as to find reconciliation after disobedience.

These two verses thus summarize inappropriate and correct access to God. They provide the basic standard by which God's people will be assessed for blessing or cursing. For the Christian, access to God is freely obtained through the work of Christ. But the danger of worshiping the modern god of materialism remains, as does the need to seek God in the quiet of regular Sabbaths and to worship the Holy One of Israel (Mt 6:33; Heb 10:25).

NOTE

1 The "carved stone" is better rendered as "stone of desire," a magical wishing stone known from Mesopotamia. One lay prostrate on it to receive one's wishes (Victor A. Hurowitz, "אבן משכית — A New Interpretation," *JBL* 118 [1999]: 201 – 8; idem, "Wish upon a Stone: Discovering the Idolatry of the *Even Maskit*," *BR* 15, no. 2 [1999]: 18 – 19). Milgrom (*Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2282) identifies this object as a decorated pavement perhaps at the threshold to the temple (Eze 46:2).

2. Blessings for Faithfulness (26:3 – 13)

3"'If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, 4I
will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the
trees of the field their fruit. 5Your threshing will continue until grape
harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat
all the food you want and live in safety in your land.
6"'I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will
make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword
will not pass through your country. 7You will pursue your enemies, and they
will fall by the sword before you. 8Five of you will chase a hundred, and a
hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the
sword before you.

9“ ‘I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your
numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. 10You will still be eating
last year’s harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the
new. 11I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you.
12I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. 13I
am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no
longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled
you to walk with heads held high.

COMMENTARY

3 The position of the blessings as first not only matches Deuteronomy and the sequence in extra-biblical law codes, but it also puts in first position the desired result — obedience.

4 The promise of rain is essential to Palestine for the fruitfulness of the land. Unlike Egypt or Mesopotamia, where rivers served as the primary source of water, in Palestine this was not possible. Instead the people depended on the rains to provide sufficient water to grow crops. Baal was considered the god that provided Canaan with rain.

5 The promise of the threshing overtaking the harvest and the harvest lasting until the planting is a picture of such great abundance that it appears in Amos 9:13 to describe a future restoration of God’s blessing for Israel. For the concept of living “in safety,” see 25:18 – 19.

6 The word for “peace” (*šālôm*, GK 8934) occurs only here in Leviticus. With the negative, the term “to make afraid” (*maḥᵉrîd*, GK 3006), it sometimes occurs as a prophetic description of judgment; for example, animals will inhabit the deserted cities, with no one to make them afraid (Isa 17:2; Jer 7:33). But its use here is closest to descriptions of a future security in which restored Israel will live at peace and in harmony with nature (Jer 30:10; 46:27; Eze 34:28; Zep 3:13; and especially Mic 4:4).

7 – 8 These promises emphasize Israel’s absolute victory against overwhelming military odds. The sense in which a small force will route an

enemy of major strength becomes part of God's blessing. This promise becomes a rhetorical question in Deuteronomy 32:10 as a means to argue for the power of God to accomplish victory for Israel. In Joshua 23:10 (contrast the incident at Ai in Jos 7:3 – 5) Joshua refers to one's putting to flight a thousand. No challenge becomes too great for the Israelites to conquer.

9 – 12 These blessings repeat the promise of fruitfulness (v.4), the promise of superabundant harvests (v.5), and the promises of God's faithfulness to uphold the covenant (cf. Israel's responsibility for this in v.1; see Ge 17:6 – 7 for an earlier linkage of promise with covenant; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2298) and to maintain his sanctuary within Israel (v.2).The verb for "walking among" Israel is identical in root and stem (Hithpael of *hlk* , GK 2143) with that used to describe God's fellowship with the first couple in the garden of Eden (Ge 3:8), which is itself a prototype of Israel's sanctuaries. The sanctuary in Israel now becomes God's place of fellowship with his people, of walking among them.

The rest of v.12, "I will . .. be your God, and you will be my people," forms a covenantal formula that describes the relationship between God and Israel. It occurs nineteen times, plus nine cases where a form of the first clause is used and in another nine where only a form of the second clause appears. The promise is set in the future as God shows Israel fully what it means for him to be their God, assuming they remain faithful. Israel as a "people" (*ʿam*, GK 6639) of God describes both their religious reality as a congregation joined in worship and their ethnic reality as the descendants of the patriarchs, to whom the divine promises were first given. See R. M. Good, *The Sheep of His Pasture: A Study of the Hebrew Noun ʿAm(m) and Its Semitic Cognates* [HSM 29; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983], 65 – 68; Joosten, 101 – 7.

13 God's self-identification resembles that at the beginning of the Decalogue (Ex 20:2; Dt 5:6), but it is not identical. The purpose here concerns the blessings just expressed. Can Israel's God accomplish them? The answer, according to v.13, is a resounding "Yes!" God brought Israel out of enslavement to the mightiest political power of that age and is the same God who will fulfill the divine promises of blessing.

NOTES

4 Baal's role is displayed in 1 Kings 18, where Elijah's victory over the priests of Baal led to rain. It also occurs in thirteenth-century BC Ugaritic mythologies, which provide detailed information concerning the nature of the Canaanite deities. The purpose of Baal's leadership was to provide rain, as important at the site of Ugarit on the Syrian coast as it was in Palestine to the south (Mark S. Smith, *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle:Volume 1: Introduction with Text,Translation and Commentary of KTU 1.1 – 1.2* [VTSup 55; Leiden: Brill, 1994], 96 – 100).

11 The term "abhor" (*gā'al*, GK 1718) occurs only in ch. 26, whereas the term "redeem" (*gā'al*, GK 1457), which occurs only in chs. 25 and 27, forms an intentional wordplay. "Abhor" occurs five times (vv.11, 15, 30, 43 – 44) and structures the chapter with God and Israel alternating as the subject. The central occurrence (in v.30) refers to God's loathing of Israel (Warning, 100 – 101).

12 The terminology used here is that of marriage and adoption, where a nonbiological union is formed (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2302).

REFLECTION

The redeeming God of the Israelites is alive also for the Christian. The One who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will fulfill his promise of giving us strength in this world to live holy lives (Ro 8:11) and of raising us from the dead after this life (2Co 4:14).

3. Curses for Disobedience: Disease and Defeat (26:14 – 17)

> 14" 'But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands,
> 15and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all
> my commands and so violate my covenant, 16then I will do this to you: I
> will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will
> destroy your sight and drain away your life. You will plant seed in vain,
> because your enemies will eat it. 17I will set my face against you so that you
> will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you,

and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

COMMENTARY

14 – 15 The curses for disobedience to God's covenant increase in severity and number through v.33. This attitude and life opposes that of the blessings (v.3). The blessings section emphasized that God is the keeper of the covenant (v.9) and will not "abhor" (*gʿl,* GK 1718; see Note on v.11) Israel. God enables a willing Israel with a favorable attitude toward God to obey the covenant; but God rejects Israel when they break the covenant and "abhor" it.

16 – 17 The expressions of God's judgment are unusual. The "sudden terror" (*behā lmâ,* GK 988) of the promised destruction occurs elsewhere three times (Ps 78:33; Isa 65:23; Jer 15:8), where it always refers to unforeseen destruction and premature death. The term for "wasting diseases" (*šaḥepet,* GK 8831) occurs elsewhere only in the curse of Deuteronomy 28:22, where the context of the term may also refer to physical maladies.The same is true of the word "fever" (*qaddaḥat,* GK 7707); its root refers to fire.

The text presents a picture in which the diseases render the Israelites helpless to oppose the usurpation of their harvest by the enemy. The judgment of flight from before the enemy and of defeat is fulfilled in Judges 6:1 – 10. Though Christ severed the connection between sin and disease (Jn 9:2 – 3), there remains the possibility of such judgment for those who defile the sanctity of the Lord's Supper without examining themselves and setting things right with God and others (1Co 11:27 – 34).

4. Further Curses for Disobedience: Drought and Sterility of Land (26:18 – 20)

18“ ‘If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your
sins seven times over. 19I will break down your stubborn pride and make
the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. 20Your
strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor
will the trees of the land yield their fruit.

COMMENTARY

18 – 20 The sevenfold punishment for continued stubbornness extends to a higher level of suffering the measure-for-measure discipline of vv.14 – 17. “Sevenfold” describes the punishment as far greater than what preceded and as a kind of full or complete punishment. God’s attempt to break Israel’s pride contrasts with the blessing of breaking the yoke of Egyptian slavery (v.13; *šbr*, GK 8689). The curse that stops the rain and renders the earth infertile, also found in Deuteronomy 28:23, reverses the blessing of v.4. God is in control, and no other deity retains the power to provide rain or withhold it.

NOTE

19 The picture of the earth as iron and of the sky as bronze also occurs in a curse found in a treaty from the seventh-century BC Assyrian king Esarhaddon (Parpola and Watanabe, 51). The reversal of this image appears in Deuteronomy 28:23. While bronze had been used for more than a thousand years, iron was relatively recent. It earliest occurrences are in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries in Egypt, Ugarit, and among the Hittites (Harris, 646).

5. Further Curses for Disobedience: Wild Animals (26:21 – 22)

> [21]“ ‘If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. [22]I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

COMMENTARY

21 – 22 The sending of wild animals also forms part of divine judgments in Deuteronomy (32:24) and elsewhere. It is the opposite of what God promised for blessings in v.6. The bereavement of children further reverses the blessings —

this time the promise of fruitfulness in v.9.

NOTE

22 This curse has parallels with those found in the treaty of Esarhaddon (Parpola and Watanabe, 51) and in the Aramaic Sefire treaty of the eighth century BC (Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* [BibOr 19; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967], 15).

6. Further Curses for Disobedience: Destruction, Plague, and Famine (26:23 – 26)

> [23]" 'If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, [24]I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. [25]And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands. [26]When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied.

COMMENTARY

23 – 24 Though v.21 mentioned the hostility (lit., "walk against," *hālmak qerî* , GK 2143, 7950) of Israel toward God, the correlation between Israel's attitude and God's response toward Israel appears here for the first time (vv.23 – 24). It recurs again in vv.27 – 28 and is reversed in vv.40 – 41. The expression occurs only in Leviticus 26. This, in addition to the sevenfold punishment (see v.18 and comment there), provides a literary means of expressing God's increasing anger and judgment as Israel continues to rebel. Thus God establishes the principle of dealing with people in like measure as they have dealt with God (2Sa 22:27; Ps 18:26).

25 – 26 Israel's world experienced military campaigns and plagues within besieged cities. They aptly describe God's judgment in which other nations and the forces of nature conspire to destroy the rebellious Israelites. Ezekiel also uses the termination of bread as a picture (Eze 4:16; 5:16 – 17; 14:13 – 20). This expression "supply of bread" (*matēh leḥem*) describes a famine situation (Ps 105:16).The inadequacy of the bread supply will never satisfy the people's hunger.

NOTE

26 This is another image that has parallels in ancient curses. A similar expression, using 100 female bakers, appears in an eighth-century BC inscription from Tell Fakhariyeh in northern Syria (S. A. Kaufman, "Reflections on the Assyrian-Aramaic Bilingual from Tell Fakhariyeh," *Maarav* 3 [1982]: 159 – 63, 170 – 72; Kaufman also reconstructs a similar curse with seven female bakers in the Sefire treaty).

7. Further Curses for Disobedience: Annihilation and Deportation (26:27 – 39)

27 " 'If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be
hostile toward me, 28 then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I
myself will punish you for your sins seven times over. 29 You will eat the
flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters. 30 I will destroy your high
places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the
lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you. 31 I will turn your cities
into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the
pleasing aroma of your offerings. 32 I will lay waste the land, so that your
enemies who live there will be appalled. 33 I will scatter you among the
nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid
waste, and your cities will lie in ruins. 34 Then the land will enjoy its
sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of
your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths. 35 All the time
that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the

sabbaths you lived in it.

36“ ‘As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them. 37They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies. 38You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you. 39Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins; also because of their fathers’ sins they will waste away.

COMMENTARY

27 – 32 Verses 27 – 28 parallel vv.23 – 24. The cannibalism of one’s own family is found as a curse in gruesome detail in Deuteronomy 28:53 – 57. It appears elsewhere in the OT in reference to divine judgment and to an enemy laying siege to a city of Israel (2Ki 6:28 – 29; Jer 19:9; Eze 5:10). The promise of God to destroy all the symbols of idolatry and the idolaters in Israel concludes with a reversal of the blessing of v.11. God will abhor sinful Israel, in contrast to the promise not to abhor righteous Israel.

Also in v.11 God spoke of his own sanctuary. Instead of blessing it, however, God here promises to destroy it so that Israel will have no cultic access to him in the midst of their calamities. There will be no way to sacrifice their purification offerings and to seek God’s mercy. No offerings will reach God, nor will God accept them if they do. To the amazement of Israel’s enemies, the fruitful land of God’s blessing (vv.4 – 6) will become desolate.

33 The scattering of Israel among the nations (Dt 28:64 – 68) has parallels with curses as early as those in the law code of Hammurabi (Roth, 136 – 37). Here, however, God not only scatters the people but also pursues them into other lands. This is something no other curse claims, because only Israel’s God can cross international boundaries at will (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2322).

34 – 39 Verses 30 – 33 describe the punishment for idolatry, the command in v.1. Verses 34 – 35 define the judgment for violation of the Sabbath command of

v.2. The root of the word for “sabbath” (*šbt* , GK 8701) occurs seven times in these two verses, indicating their theme and connection with v.2. Further, this provides an explanation for the laws regarding the sabbatical years that appeared in ch. 25. The failure to observe them means that the land will have rest for each of the sabbatical years that Israel failed to observe — a point applied to Israel’s historic exile (2Ch 36:2; cf. Jer 25:11; 29:10).

Verses 36 – 37 describe those left in the land; they will fear their enemies and therefore not be able to fight. Verses 38 – 39 conclude the picture with the image of those who experience deportation. These too will diminish and die. The cumulative effect of the sins of generations will bring about the collapse and destruction of all Israel.

NOTES

30 Some “high places” were religious centers in towns rather than open air sanctuaries. The “incense altars” are better translated as “incense stands” placed on the altars (2Ch 34:4; Levine, 188; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2316 – 18). For “abhor,” see comment on v.11.

31 The plural term for “sanctuaries” implies a time before the centralization of all worship by Josiah.

8. Repentance and Forgiveness (26:40 – 43)

40“ ‘But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers — their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, 41which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies — then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, 42I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

43For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees.

COMMENTARY

40 – 41 The confession of sin (Hithpael of *ydh* , GK 3344) appeared in 5:5 as the first step in the reparation offering for certain offenses. It also occurs in 16:21 to describe the high priestly confession of the sins of Israel over the goat to be sent into the wilderness. In each case this involves the admission and declaration of failings on the part of the sinner(s). With regard to the sins of "treachery" (*mā*ʿ*al* , GK 5086), see 5:15. "Hostility" is a repeated theme in the curses (vv.23 – 24).Thus the acts of treason against God are confessed and reversed.

The attitude of humility (*knʿ*, GK 4044) is used here for the first time. It is joined with Israel's acceptance of its iniquity. This is the meaning of the last phrase in v.41. Israel does not pay for their sin, but they "accept" (*rṣh*, GK 8354) it.

42 – 43 At this point God is able to remember the covenant with their ancestors — both an earlier covenant and one prior to Israel's sins. Only God is ever the subject of the phrase "remember the covenant." The opposite of remembering is not forgetting the covenant but breaking it. The phrase means that God acts on past promises in the covenant to save and redeem his people through miraculous acts in the present (Hartley, 469). In the NT it is this remembrance of the covenantal meal that calls on God to enact salvation through the Son's atoning death and resurrection (Lk 22:19; 1Co 11:24).

This covenant can now be reenacted once the sabbatical years are fulfilled for the land. The land must have its rest before it can again be fruitful for Israel. The word that refers to how the land will "enjoy" its sabbaticals is the same root as that in v.41, where Israel will "accept" their sin. Thus the time of Israel's coming to terms with what they have done and suffering in exile for it will correspond to the repose of the land and its presumed preparation to receive the people again. For the Christian, sincere confession of sin yields forgiveness and restoration to fellowship (1Jn 1:9).

9. God's Faithfulness (26:44 – 45)

[44]Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God. [45]But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.' "

COMMENTARY

44 – 45 God's holiness, affirmed by the repetition of his self-designation, "I am the LORD" and "their God," establishes the need for judgment and punishment. It also provides for faithfulness to God's covenant with Israel despite all appearances to the contrary. Israel can know that even in exile there is hope, for their God is the same God who made the covenant with their ancestors and who will remain faithful to it. Though Israel abhorred God, God will not abhor them. The exodus from Egypt should be added to what God will do "in the sight of the nations." In Ezekiel 28:25 and 39:27 (cf. Ps 98:2), this phrase refers to God's promise to lead Israel back from exile.

Alongside the reference to the exodus from Egypt in v.45, the hope can remain, though here unexpressed, that God will act to bring his people back to their land. For the Christian, God's faithfulness means that the salvation he has begun to work in the believer's life will be brought forward to its completion in the full experience of eternal life (Php 1:6).

NOTES

45 The "covenant with their ancestors" refers to both the patriarchal covenant and the one given at Sinai, which renewed and expanded the earlier covenant (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2339, 2345).

10. Conclusion (26:46)

[46]These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD

established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses.

COMMENTARY

46 This conclusion refers to "the decrees" (*haḥuqqîm*, GK 2976; 10:11), "the laws" (*hammišpāṭîm*, GK 5477; 18:4 – 5, 26; 19:37; 20:22; 25:18; 26:15, 43), and "the regulations" (*hattôrōt*, GK 9368; 6:2, 7, 18; 7:1, 11; 13:59; 14:57; 15:32) or "rituals" that God has given throughout Leviticus. The terms refer to this entire book.

The references to God's speaking on Mount Sinai through Moses to the Israelites parallel the same statements in 25:1 – 2 and thus form a special envelope construction linking together chs. 25 and 26. This explains the references to the sabbatical years (vv.44 – 45) and assigns a special priority to this aspect of care for the land. But it is as a conclusion to the entire book of Leviticus that these verses serve their purpose. They demonstrate that all the words of the book must be understood as bearing the authority of God's word given through Moses.

VI. ADDENDUM ON VOWS AND THINGS DEDICATED AND DEVOTED (27:1 – 34)

OVERVIEW

If 26:46 forms a concluding comment on Leviticus, ch. 27 constitutes an addendum. It deals with special gifts, vows, and things dedicated to the Lord. When discussed earlier, these were part of larger matters of regulation: the fellowship offerings that can be used as special gifts to God (7:15 – 17), the quality of the animal sacrificed (22:18 – 25), and the suggestion that Israel would give such offerings in addition to supplying the required sacrifices and attending the required festivals (23:37 – 38).

Unlike previous sacrifices, those in ch. 27 are not obligatory for all Israel, nor are they breaches in the sanctity of the congregation. Instead they are vows and gifts that individuals take on in the course of their dealings with God. They describe the free acts of dedication to God by those who wish to perform them. Also included are the spoils of war (vv.28 – 29). But the use of the singular here suggests the text addresses the individual warrior's dedication of the spoils rather than a national commitment.

In other words, Leviticus 27 discusses voluntary vows and gifts. Thus, the gifts noted here describe a proper "addendum" to the people of God, who rejoice in their salvation and express that joy to God. Topics include: vows (vv.1 – 13), dedicated property (vv.14 – 27), devoted items and people (vv.28 – 29), tithes (vv.30 – 33), and conclusion (v.34). Chapter 27, in its discussion of things that belong to and are dedicated to the Lord, provides closure to the opening chapters of Leviticus, which deal with the same subject — the sacrifices that are given to the Lord and to the priests (Douglas, 244). This discusses that which is holy. It is no accident that the expression "most holy" (= "holy of holies"; *qdš*, GK 7731) refers to sacrifices and things "devoted" (or "banned") only in 2:3, 10 and 27:28 (Warning, 63, 169).

REFLECTION

For the Christian, contemporary materialism and the explicit doctrine that greed is good, as taught by all forms of the media, oppose gifts and offerings to God as part of a disciple's life (1Co 16:2; 1Ti 6:10; 2Ti 3:2; Heb 13:5). As in ancient Israel, so in the modern world these gifts return to God a portion of all that belongs to him and demonstrate discipline by a person's refusal to make the acquisition of wealth an end in itself.

A. Vows (27:1 – 13)

[1]The LORD said to Moses, [2]"Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the LORD by giving equivalent values, [3]set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; [4]and if it is

a female, set her value at thirty shekels. [5]If it is a person between the ages of five and twenty, set the value of a male at twenty shekels and of a female at ten shekels. [6]If it is a person between one month and five years, set the value of a male at five shekels of silver and that of a female at three shekels of silver. [7]If it is a person sixty years old or more, set the value of a male at fifteen shekels and of a female at ten shekels. [8]If anyone making the vow is too poor to pay the specified amount, he is to present the person to the priest, who will set the value for him according to what the man making the vow can afford.

[9]“ ‘If what he vowed is an animal that is acceptable as an offering to the Lord, such an animal given to the Lord becomes holy. [10]He must not exchange it or substitute a good one for a bad one, or a bad one for a good one; if he should substitute one animal for another, both it and the substitute become holy. [11]If what he vowed is a ceremonially unclean animal — one that is not acceptable as an offering to the Lord — the animal must be presented to the priest, [12]who will judge its quality as good or bad. Whatever value the priest then sets, that is what it will be. [13]If the owner wishes to redeem the animal, he must add a fifth to its value.

COMMENTARY

1 Vows express gratitude for safety through some danger (2Sa 15:8; Jnh 1:16; 2:9), for the birth of a child (1Sa 1:11; Pr 31:2), or for no clear reason (1Sa 1:21). On the one hand, God commands vows (Ps 76:11). On the other hand, the Bible warns Israelites to fulfill their vows completely (Ecc 5:4; Mal 1:14) and observes that it is better not to make vows at all than to fail to fulfill them (Pr 20:25; Ecc 5:5).

2 – 8 The vow here concerns the dedicating of a person to God. People would dedicate themselves to God for unspecified reasons. They could also dedicate someone else (e.g., infants). But rather than remain in God’s service at the sanctuary, such people paid a fixed sum and redeemed themselves. Differences between sexes and ages in the stipulated amounts reflect the presumed value of the services of a person so dedicated. In cases of poverty, redemption must be possible, but the price may be adjusted by a priest according to what a person can afford.

The differences in value between genders do not necessarily reflect social status or an innate productive capacity (Levine, 193). Rather, the demands of childbearing (and raising) for women would have reduced the available time for them to work. In this regard, the values placed on women remain surprisingly high (Carol Meyers, “Procreation, Production and Protection: Male – Female Balance in Early Israel,” *JAAR* 51 [1983]: 584 – 87). The specified amounts are:

Monetary Value of People Dedicated to God

Age	Male	Female
1 month – 5 years	5 shekels	3 shekels
5 – 20 years	20 shekels	10 shekels
20 – 60 years	50 shekels	30 shekels
60+ years	15 shekels	10 shekels

9 – 13 To vow an animal to God’s ser vice is not unknown. An animal, if an appropriate species, could be used for sacrifice. The animal vowed must be the same one delivered to the priests. It is possible that the animal selected could have been vowed some time before its presentation. It may have become ill in the meantime, or it may have proven itself to be exceptionally valuable to its owners. Whatever the case, no other animal could substitute.

Malachi 1:12 – 14 describes the substitution of sick and deformed animals. Leviticus forbids this practice and exacts a fine that requires both the substitute and the original animal. Redemption of an animal was allowed if the owner paid the fair market value of the animal plus an additional 20 per cent. Milgrom (*Leviticus 23 – 27* , 2380) suggests that the additional one fifth originated with the amount that Joseph charged for all the Egyptian produce he collected (Ge 47:23 – 26). The effect here enhances the holy character of what is vowed. It is not to be given with one hand and taken back with the other. The vow is a holy act and, once given to God, the thing vowed cannot be returned without additional compensation that recognizes in a small manner the sanctity of the process.

NOTES

2 – 8 Wenham ("Leviticus 27 and the Price of Slaves," *ZAW* 90 [1978]: 264 – 65) has contended that the values here were related to the price of slaves, because the basic form of a vow was a dedication of oneself and one's labor to God.

2 For *ʿerkĕkā* ("your value," GK 6886), see note at 5:15.

9 – 13 The fine for illegal substitutes, in which both the animal dedicated and the substitute are given to the temple, parallels the same punishment for withholding animals dedicated to Hittite temples (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2404 – 6).

12 Following customs at Nuzi, the focus of this verse is the priest's value assessment. Thus it should be translated, "who will judge it; high or low, whatever the priest's assessment, it shall be so" (E. Speiser, "Leviticus and the Critics," *Yehezkel Kaufmann Jubilee Volume*, ed. M. Haran [Jerusalem: Magnes, 1960], 40 – 41; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2378).

REFLECTION

For the Christian the section on people dedicated to God suggests the great importance of "redeeming the time." Worth is not determined by measuring amounts of shekels, nor is it based on the gender or age of a person (Gal 3:28; Ac 2:17). Everyone has been given gifts by God to use within the church. These talents and abilities should be dedicated to Christ and used for service with liberality (1Co 12; Eph 4:7 – 16).

Also Christians must be careful when making vows to God. In the modern age, when one's word seems to carry little weight, promises made to God are not considered to be light (Gal 6:7; Jas 4:13 – 15).

B. Dedicated Property (27:14 – 27)

14“ ‘If a man dedicates his house as something holy to the LORD, the
priest will judge its quality as good or bad. Whatever value the priest then
sets, so it will remain. 15If the man who dedicates his house redeems it, he
must add a fifth to its value, and the house will again become his.
16“ ‘If a man dedicates to the LORD part of his family land, its value is to
be set according to the amount of seed required for it — fifty shekels of
silver to a homer of barley seed. 17If he dedicates his field during the Year
of Jubilee, the value that has been set remains. 18But if he dedicates his
field after the Jubilee, the priest will determine the value according to the
number of years that remain until the next Year of Jubilee, and its set value
will be reduced.
19If the man who dedicates the field wishes to redeem it, he must add a
fifth to its value, and the field will again become his. 20If, however, he does
not redeem the field, or if he has sold it to someone else, it can never be
redeemed. 21When the field is released in the Jubilee, it will become holy,
like a field devoted to the LORD; it will become the property of the priests.
22“ ‘If a man dedicates to the LORD a field he has bought, which is not
part of his family land, 23the priest will determine its value up to the Year of
Jubilee, and the man must pay its value on that day as something holy to the
LORD. 24In the Year of Jubilee the field will revert to the person from
whom he bought it, the one whose land it was. 25Every value is to be set
according to the sanctuary shekel, twenty gerahs to the shekel.
26“ ‘No one, however, may dedicate the firstborn of an animal, since the
firstborn already belongs to the Lord; whether an ox or a sheep, it is the
Lord’s. 27If it is one of the unclean animals, he may buy it back at its set
value, adding a fifth of the value to it. If he does not redeem it, it is to be
sold at its set value.

COMMENTARY

14 – 15 Though priests are individually forbidden to own land (Nu 18:20), the priesthood as a whole can acquire land. But the dedication, as described in v.14, is for the period up to the Year of Jubilee, at which time the property reverts to the ownership of the family to whom God allotted it. Redemption requires the agreed upon price plus 20 percent (cf. v.13). Thus the owner buys back the land

before the Jubilee Year requires its return.

16 – 19 The (arable) land's value is calculated according to the amount of seed required for sowing it each season (Harrison, 237), regardless of how fruitful the land is thought to be. Whether in the desert or in lush greenery, it comes to fifty silver shekels for the full fifty years of the period of Jubilee. This averages out to one shekel per homer of barley, a calculation that could vary between three-and-a-half and seven bushels of grain, depending on how the dry capacity units relate to one another (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2382 – 83). Though this may be a low cost for redemption, it does not take into account the labor required to plant, tend, and harvest the crop (Wenham, 340).

20 – 21 A conjunction joins the two clauses in v.20. It should be translated "and," not "or." The most cogent analyses of this text (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2383 – 86; M. Haran, "*ʿarāk*m *îm*," *Encyclopae-dia Miqra,it* 6 [1971] 391 – 94 [Hebrew]; cf. Walter Houston, "Contrast in Tense and Exegesis: The Case of the Field Vowed and Sold," *VT* 49 [1999]: 416 – 20) suggest that the owner sold the property to a third party and subsequently, while the property was still in the hands of that third party, the original owner dedicated the property to the temple. When the field reverted to the owner at the Jubilee, it would pass into the possession of the priesthood.

Verse 21 designates the field as "devoted," using the verbal form of the root for devoting something to the "ban" (*ḥrm*, GK 3051). Property so devoted could never be returned to any owner other than God. How would such a circumstance emerge? One can imagine situations in which the owners of small plots found themselves in permanent debt to a few rich landowners. Their lands would go to the wealthy owner. When the Jubilee arrived, only a small part of the debt was paid, so the land returned to the use of the wealthy landowner for another fifty years. The device suggested in these verses allowed the original owner (actually a family) to free themselves of another's clutches by placing their land and themselves in the ser vice of the priesthood. The latter, who did not individually own land and who were held to a higher standard, might perhaps be more merciful.

22 – 27 One who leased land from an owner could also dedicate the leased land to the sanctuary until the Jubilee. Then it would revert back to the owner.

The value of the dedicated land would depend on how many years remained before the next Jubilee. The control of the standard by the sanctuary would provide the only certain means to regulating weights of metal and their value throughout the twelve tribes of Israel.

For the Christian, the dedication of the land for God's use exemplifies the generosity and sacrifice of those believers whose relationship to God is paramount. The gifts of land for the benefit of the early church remained a means by which the physical needs of many could be met (Ac 4:34 – 35).

NOTES

16 S. Rattray calculates a homer at 117.5 liters, or about 3.5 bushels (in Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 2382).

20 J. R. Porter, "Lev.xxvii 20: Some Further Considerations," *VT* 50 (2000): 569 – 71, argues that the law blocks the seller's attempt to recoup the loss of dedicated property. Compare Elliger, 388 – 89 (contra Gerstenberger, 445), for a related interpretation.

25 A "gerah" may weigh one twentieth of a shekel (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27*, 3287). A shekel would weigh about twelve grams.

C. Devoted Items and People (27:28 – 29)

28“ ‘But nothing that a man owns and devotes to the LORD — whether
man or animal or family land — may be sold or redeemed; everything so
devoted is most holy to the LORD.
29“ ‘No person devoted to destruction may be ransomed; he must be put
to death.

COMMENTARY

28 – 29 This summarizes the topic of those items and people devoted to the "ban" (vv.20 – 21). Property, animals, and people may be devoted. But this devotion is not something that provides any redemption. Thus such devotion is envisioned in terms of war booty (Dt 20:10 – 28). That which is so devoted to God cannot be redeemed. It has become God's property forever (cf. Achan's sin in Jos 7). In times of peace, as described here, it may be exemplified by the "ban" that Ezra imposed on the property of those who refused to attend the assembly (Ezra 10:8).

D. Tithes (27:30 – 33)

30“ ‘A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or
fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD. 31If a
man redeems any of his tithe, he must add a fifth of the value to it. 32The
entire tithe of the herd and flock — every tenth animal that passes under the
shepherd's rod — will be holy to the LORD. 33He must not pick out the
good from the bad or make any substitution. If he does make a substitution,
both the animal and its substitute become holy and cannot be redeemed.' "

COMMENTARY

30 – 33 Tithes of all produce harvested from or born on Israelite land belong to God. This does not appear to be voluntary. Similarly in Mesopotamia, early records indicate the obligatory nature of what was essentially a tax. Other legal collections in the Bible do not know of a voluntary tithe either (Dt 14:22 – 29; Milgrom, *Leviticus 23 – 27* , 2246 – 51). The tithe requires every Israelite to recognize God's ownership of all they have been blessed with. The shepherd may not choose the best or the worst animals from the flock. Instead, a random selection of every tenth animal that passes by the shepherd's rod forms the "tax" due to the sanctuary. This is not an innovation. Jacob, ancestor of Israel, vowed to return a tenth of all that God had given him (Ge 28:20 – 22). Thus the principle of the tithe begins with Israel's earliest history and continues throughout the existence of God's people.

REFLECTION

For Christians it is difficult, on the basis of NT teachings, to determine a specific percentage of wealth that must be surrendered to God. But giving gifts was integral to the life of the NT church, and the practice remains an example of how Christians show their love (Ac 4:34 – 35; 11:30; 1Co 16:2; Php 4:17).

E. Conclusion (27:34)

[34]These are the commands the LORD gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites.

COMMENTARY

34 This is a second conclusion. The first appeared at the end of the preceding chapter (26:46). Chapter 27 forms an addendum to the book but is no less important in terms of its teaching. See comment at the introduction to this chapter.

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