

# Introduction to Genesis

The more we move on in life the more interested we become in tracing our roots: where did our ancestors live? How did our parents come to know each other? Who influenced us in our first decisions? All peoples likewise have tried to reconstruct their past. No doubt they want to save it from oblivion, but more especially they hope to find in the past a confirmation of what they themselves believed. Relating their history surrounding them, has a way of affirming their own identity among the many nations, both great and small.

That is what we find in Genesis – a book that was gradually formed through several centuries. It finally took a definitive form in the fifth century BC when the Jewish people, having returned from the Babylonian captivity fixed forever the expression of their faith.

*Genesis* means beginning. We will not look so much at it as a document on the origins of the universe or of a sin committed by our first ancestors. Rather, from the first pages, we shall find through images all that is important for us.

The book has three parts. Chapters 1–11 attempts to span vast periods of time from the beginning of creation up to the first “ancestors of the faith” whose names have been remembered, the first of whom is Abraham.

The second part recalls the life of the nomadic clans who believed in a God who was near and compassionate, the “God of their ancestors.” This history (or these stories) take place in the land of Canaan at a time in which the Israelite people did not yet exist (between the 18th and 15th century before Christ). It shows how faith in God’s promises – promises he never fails to fulfill – is the soul of all our religious quest and is the subject of chapters 12–38.

A third part, the history of Joseph, throws a first light on the meaning of our life and the tragedies that are the threads in the weaving of human existence. Human beings need a Savior and salvation comes first through those whom they have persecuted and rejected.

## ***Who wrote the book of Genesis?***

There was not one author, but several. The people of Israel were formed through time by the gathering of nomadic tribes which neither knew how to read nor write. They brought along with them the memories of their forebears and the signs God realized among them; these memories were verbally transmitted.

When these tribes settled in Palestine, they slowly entered into a new culture of writing. Scribes surrounding the king wrote the laws and the beliefs of the nation. During Solomon’s reign (tenth century BC) an unknown writer often called “the yahwist” wrote a first history of God’s people. In doing so he freely used Babylonian literature and its poetry about the first couple and the Flood. The author used a part but deeply transformed them, so that these stories, as comparisons, would express God’s plans for his creation.

Later this old account was supplemented with others coming from different traditions. As a result, we sometimes find repetitions.

Much later, when the Jews returned from Exile in Babylon (5th century before Christ), their priests added many paragraphs which are indicated in italics. The priests were the authors of the poem about *creation* in seven days, where Genesis and the Bible itself begin.

# GENESIS



**1** • <sup>1</sup> *In the beginning, when God began to create the heavens and the earth,* <sup>2</sup> *the earth had no form and was void; darkness was over the deep and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.*

<sup>3</sup> *God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.* <sup>4</sup> *God saw that the light was good and he separated the light from the darkness.* <sup>5</sup> *God called the light 'Day' and the darkness 'Night'. There was evening and there was morning: the first day.*

<sup>6</sup> *God said, "Let there be a firm ceiling between the waters and let it separate waters from waters."* <sup>7</sup> *So God made the ceiling and separated the waters below it from the waters above it. And so it was.* <sup>8</sup> *God called the firm ceiling 'Sky'. There was evening and there was morning: the second day.*

Is  
45:7  
60:19  
2Cor  
4:6

Ps 8  
Ps  
104  
Jer  
10:11  
Pro  
8:22  
Job  
38  
Rev  
22:5

<sup>9</sup> *God said, "Let the waters below the sky be gathered together in one place and let dry land appear." And so it was.* <sup>10</sup> *God called the dry land 'Earth', and the waters gathered together he called 'Seas'. God saw that it was good.*

<sup>11</sup> *God said, "Let the earth produce vegetation, seed-bearing plants, fruit-trees bearing fruit with seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And so it was.* <sup>12</sup> *The earth produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kind and trees producing fruit which has seed, according to their kind. God saw that it was good.* <sup>13</sup> *There was evening and there was morning: the third day.*

<sup>14</sup> *God said, "Let there be lights in the ceiling of the sky to separate day from night and to serve as signs for the sea-*

Job  
26:8  
Is  
51:10

Jer  
31:35  
Bar  
3:33  
Is  
40:26

• **1.1** We have to make an effort to look at this first page without prejudice. For the past hundred and fifty years, there have been too many debates on the theme "creation according to the bible and according to science." This problem, poorly presented and resolved in an even worse way, usually leaves us dissatisfied. We are not looking here for historical or scientific data: those who wrote this chapter had many other things to tell us and God had the right to endorse their work even if they saw the sky as a blue ceiling on which someone attached the stars. Therefore, we have a Word of God here, but we do not read them as if they were "the" last word on the understanding of the universe. Just as all ancient religions have their own account of the origin of the world so has the Bible; but it has more to say and says it where many do not look: in the New Testament. For the revelation of the mystery of God-Creator it was necessary to wait for the coming of Christ: see Jn 1 and Eph 1.

This rhythmic account, with its repetitions and its liturgical form, is like a preface, the overture of the first nucleus of the Bible produced in the fifth century before Christ as the Jews came back from their captivity in Babylon.

But what does it mean? That God made everything? Of course. God, one God, different from the universe and who exists before it. However, what matters for the author is to show that God is beyond this creation which may either amaze or crush us, beyond a nature so rich and dominating that we are overwhelmed by its beauty.

*The Spirit of God hovered over the waters.* We have to know that in Hebrew, it is the word "breath" or "wind" which signifies "spirit" (see John 3:18). Here we have the Spirit of God, as breath, named just before the Word. Word and

Spirit are like the two hands of God the creator. This is precisely what we profess in the Creed: The Holy Spirit has spoken through the prophets.

God works through his Word bearer of his will. From that moment the Word, called in other places the Wisdom, organizes the universe, but not as a foreign land which God would look from on high; it is a place He will visit one day.

*God said.* This is like a divider put between God and his creatures. The world is not God and is not a face of God; it did not come out from God as from an Infinite which lets its riches slip away without knowing nor dominating them. Somehow the world is in God, but God is outside the world and does not depend upon it. We should not forget that when later the New Testament speaks of communion with God: such a communion can only occur if God personally calls us.

God creates – this means first of all that God puts order. *First day... second day... seventh day.* All the creatures are not at the same level. First a material universe where life will appear later on, with its thousands realizations, diversified and ordered. The Hebrews divided the world into three regions: the sky, earth and water. We discover this order: days 1 and 4, 2 and 5, 3 and 6. Everything comes at its appointed hour.

God organizes the world and gives meaning to our existence. See how the sun and moon are not there only to give light: in measuring time they provide the basis of a calendar. There is no human life, no family life without feasts, without discipline and regularity in rising and going to bed, in hours for work and hours for meals.

*God saw that it was good.* There is nothing bad in all that God created even though the author does not deny the existence of evil forces in the world: to the Israelites the sea and the night

sons, days and years; <sup>15</sup> and let these lights in the sky shine above the earth.” And so it was. <sup>16</sup> God therefore made two great lights, the greater light to govern the day and the smaller light to govern the night; and God made the stars as well. <sup>17</sup> God placed them in the ceiling of the sky to give light on the earth <sup>18</sup> and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fourth day.

Ps  
136:  
7  
Sir  
43:1

<sup>20</sup> God said, “Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth under the ceiling of the sky.” <sup>21</sup> God created the great monsters of the sea and all living animals, those that teem in the waters, according to their kind, and every winged bird, according to its kind. God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup> God blessed them saying, “Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the waters of the sea, and let the birds increase on the earth.” <sup>23</sup> There was evening and there was morning: the fifth day.

Is  
27:1  
Ps  
74:13  
Job  
40  
Jon  
26

<sup>24</sup> God said, “Let the earth produce living animals according to their kind: cattle, creatures that move along the ground, wild animals according to their kind.” So it was. <sup>25</sup> God created the wild animals according to their kind, and everything that creeps along the ground according to its kind. God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> God said, “Let us make man in our image, to our likeness. Let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over the wild animals, and over all creeping things that crawl along the ground.” <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> God 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 sky, over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Sir  
17:4  
Mt  
19:4  
1Cor  
11:7  
Jas  
3:9  
Eph  
4:24  
Col  
3:10  
Gen  
8:17  
9:1  
Ps  
8:5

<sup>29</sup> God said, “I have given you every seed-bearing plant which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree that

Ps  
104:  
14

were evil forces. But now, all these forces are contained: the sea has its limits and night gives way to light every day. However, we will have to raise the question: Who put evil in the world? (See Gen 3; Wis 1:14; Sir 13:1; James 1:17.)

God’s work is completed with the creation of humanity. The text provides us with three decisive statements which are at the root of the Christian concept of humankind. In time these convictions brought about modernity and they gained credence well beyond the Christian world.

– *God created man in his image.* Here we have one of the most important statements of the Bible: human beings are not hopelessly confined to the world of their fantasies and illusions; they are not prisoners of their own categories and structures, instead they are created for the Truth. God can communicate essential things to them in human language and through human experiences: we are not condemned to doubt forever. We are created in God’s image and, of course, to respond to God.

– *Male and female he created them.* Where the Bible states that God created man, it does not speak of man nor of woman alone, but of the couple. The image of God is not that of an individual prisoner in his solitude and his sufficiency, but of the couple.

So we avoid simplistic images of materialist theories: the division of the sexes would be nothing more than the product of chance in the

transformation of chromosomes, and also by chance love would follow from the division of the sexes. But love has first place in God’s plan and the long evolution of sexuality has been its preparation.

– *Let them rule...* This is not intended for human beings to be tyrannical or domineering, endangering human existence on a garbage-can planet. God gives them the entire universe. Human beings will use everything, even life itself, to grow, to mature and to bring the human adventure to completion before returning to God.

*Be fruitful and increase in number.* God blesses them. It would be wrong to use this blessing to preach procreation without responsibility (see Wis 4:11 praising families whose children are well educated, useful and good before God). However, on many occasions, the Bible will show that a people who no longer has children has lost the road of divine blessings.

*I have given you every seed-bearing plant.* With these words the author expresses the ideal of a non-violent world in which not even animals would be killed. But later, a concession is made (Gen 9:3) because God takes into consideration the true condition of sinful humanity.

*God rested on the seventh day.* Respect for this seventh day, called “sabbath” in Hebrew, that is to say, “rest,” is one of the pillars of Israelite and Christian practice. It is a holy day, that is to say, a day entirely different from the

bears fruit with seed. It will be for your food. <sup>30</sup>To every wild animal, to every bird of the sky, to everything that creeps along the ground, to everything that has the breath of life, I give every green plant for food.” So it was.

<sup>Ecl 3:11</sup>  
<sup>1Tim 4:4</sup> <sup>31</sup>God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. There was evening and there was morning: the sixth day.

<sup>Ex 20:11</sup>  
<sup>Heb 4:4</sup> **2** <sup>1</sup>That was the way the sky and earth were created and all their vast array. <sup>2</sup>By the seventh day the work God had done was completed,

other days, a day which makes us holy and different from others. Thanks to that day, people escape from their enslavement to work and they are available for an encounter with God, with others and with themselves (see Ex 20:8 and the promises expressed in Is 56:4; 58:13).

#### CREATION AND MODERN HUMANKIND

When the Bible says that God creates everything and is before all things, it exalts man who comes from God and is no longer a product of chance.

The Bible frees people from anguish. Primitive peoples thought they were dependent on the caprice of their gods; even the Greeks, so proud of freedom, accepted the weight of a destiny from which no one could escape. Their aim to dominate nature was blocked by fear of offending these gods, their masters.

The Bible, on the other hand, presents believers not afraid of the hidden power of the stars (they are “lamps” at God’s service), nor of any curse in their destiny when they look for the secrets of the universe; it is no accident that the great thrust of civilization originated in the Christianized West.

#### A PROPHETIC MESSAGE

This first page of the Bible lays the foundation of a Christian view of life. But we also say that it has a prophetic value in the sense that if we reread it now after having received the Gospel, these ancient words let new truths show through. Here are a few examples:

Genesis says: *In the beginning*, speaking of creation which appears outside of God in time, but John will tell us more clearly about that beginning (Jn 1:1) which does not cease for God. Because God is not subject to time: God lives in that permanent fullness which we call eternity and in which there is no before or after, no duration, no fatigue and no boredom. In the beginning, God projects himself in his Son who is both the image of God and his Word (Col 1:15; Heb 1:3). Yet in this same beginning God

and he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had done. <sup>3</sup>And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on that day he rested from all the work he had done in his creation. <sup>4</sup>These are the successive steps in the creation of the heavens and the earth. <sup>Jer 10:11</sup>

#### The story of Eden

• On the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>there was not yet on the earth any shrub of the fields, nor had any plant yet sprung up, for Yahweh God had not made it rain on the earth, and there was no man to till

creates the world outside of himself in order to place in it the richness that he contemplates in his Son. It is at that point that the universe and spirits, space and time do begin.

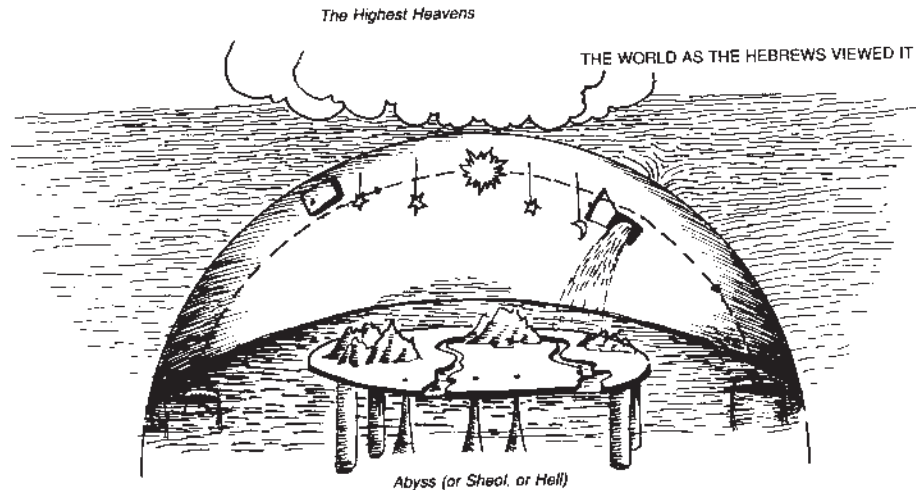
This universe which defies our imagination by its dimensions and its duration is then an expression of God’s profound mystery. All human history that will take place there will be “sacred history” where God will fulfill an eternal desire: his will to love us, to lead us to maturity and unite us in Christ.

*Rule over....* Despite their frailty, their human beings have been chosen by God to be the link between God and the universe. From the first moment of creation God planned that his Son would become man (Eph 1:1-14); to him refer the words of Psalm 8: *What is man that you should remember him? You crowned him with glory and honor and gave him the works of your hands.* (See 1 Cor 15:24.)

*On the seventh day God rested.* This rest of God doesn’t mean that since then God regards his creation from afar (Jn 5:17). We should rather understand that God’s creation and even the work of humans lead to the endless day when we shall rest in God and share his happiness. (See Heb 4:1-10.)

• **2.4** Following the “creation of the universe” that takes up the first chapter of Genesis, the Bible presents a much older account: Man and Woman in the garden of Eden. For us it is like a dream of lost happiness, but this is not the way its author intended it. In those days people did not ask: Where are we going? They thought only in terms of the past: in the beginning, God or the gods had established all things as they ought to be and then everything worked well. Therefore this story of the first couple was like a mirror in which people rediscovered existing human beings, their choices and their future.

Consequently, we should not think of a first man Tarzan-like Adam whose sin brought all its trials to humanity. Some of the “Fathers of the Church,” like Saint Irenaeus, had a better perspective when they considered that human his-



The ancient people viewed the earth as a round table whose pillars descended into the ocean. In the uppermost part were the Heavens among the Heavens, or *the Highest Heavens*, the dwelling place of God. The sun, the moon and the stars hung from a canopy called *ceiling*. The rain flowed from *waters from above*, on the ceiling or firmament. The place of the dead, or *hell*, was under the earth, and was connected to our world through thousands of openings which were the sepulchers of the dead.

tory was directed by the pedagogy of God whose sole ambition was to foster the growth of "Adam," namely, humankind, and to bring it to maturity (Eph 4:13).

Yahweh, the Holy God, is pictured as the owner of a marvelous garden (*Eden* means *delights*) where he likes to take a walk after the heat of the day (3:8). We need not imagine a huge stage: all we have here are two trees, Man and his companion. *Animals* pass by to be subject to *Adam* (that is the meaning of naming them in 2:20). But no matter how small the Eden of the human couple is, what takes place there will, in the end, determine the lot of the entire earth. Thus, at the beginning, the small fountain of Eden is seen as feeding the great rivers of the world, especially the *Euphrates* and the *Gihon* which are thousands of kilometers apart.

Should we speak of *Adam* or of *Man*? In Hebrew *Adam* means any human being. When the word is used as a proper name without the article (as for example in 5:1; 5:3), we say *Adam*. Here, however, the Bible says "the" *Adam*, that is *Man*, *the human one*. In this regard, let us recall the words of Origen, the great biblicist who, living in the 3rd century, wrote: "As to Adam and his sin, only those who know that in Hebrew *Adam* means *man*, will really understand the profound meaning of this story. In those passages presented as the story of Adam, Moses gives his teaching about human nature."

Notice how Yahweh, the good craftsman and artist that he is, works the clay with his own hands, looking at the one who is still unable to know him and preparing him to receive from his "blowing" both breath and life. About *breath of life*, or the human *soul*, see paragraph 83 in the index: *Biblical Teaching*.

Humankind in harmony with the created universe: in Eden, Adam is like in an oasis in the middle of the desert. And with the human couple united, all of nature is in order.

Adam is placed in the garden to cultivate it: humanity will be built up at the same time as it

takes possession of the world. It will have to toil for many centuries in order to develop, to know itself and to know what it can do.

God withdrew, but humans live through the grace of God whose breath constantly awakens them so that they will not fall asleep or fall back to where they came from. Should the Spirit abandon the human race, within a few minutes, or generations, *Adam* would return to dust: *Adam*, that is, you and me; as well as families, and societies. We may proclaim the death of God, but in fact, men and women without God are the ones who die with all their works.

What is the meaning of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*? Good and evil mean this: what is good and useful and what is not. So this tree is the tree of wisdom, of the art of living and of being happy. God opens up a road of wisdom before humankind, but human beings are free. Will they refuse to travel that road, not to be the ones who know and decide authoritatively what will be good for them?

*It is not good for Man to be alone* (2:18). God, who does not know solitude, created both sexes, not as a necessary means to communicate life, but so that the two might be united in love, the gift of self and shared happiness.

*He did not find among them a helper like himself* (2:20). The parade of animals prepares us to discover the unique value of Woman: she is his companion and not his servant.

*Adam fell asleep* (2:21) so that God might work out a transmutation in him: he would become one in two persons; and this will be a new birth for each one of them.

*She shall be called woman*. In Hebrew the words man and woman begin with the same syllable, a symbol of their profound kinship. On this subject, see Mt 2:15; Lk 8:1; 1 Cor 7:4; 7:10; Eph 5:31.

*That is why man leaves his father and mother*. Jewish custom required a woman to leave her family in order to enter in her husband's clan. Yet, people recalled that in ancient

the earth, <sup>6</sup>but a mist went up from the earth and watered the surface of the earth.

<sup>7</sup>Then Yahweh God formed Man, dust drawn from the clay, and breathed into his nostrils a breath of life and Man became alive with breath. <sup>8</sup>God planted a garden in Eden in the east and there he placed Man whom he had created. <sup>9</sup>Yahweh God caused to grow from the ground every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat, also the tree of Life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river flowed from Eden to water the garden and from there it divided to form four main streams. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first river is Pishon. It is the one that flows around all the country of Havilah where there is gold, <sup>12</sup>and the gold of that country is good; bidellium and onyx stone are there. <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the one

that flows around all the land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is Tigris. It is the one that flows to the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

<sup>15</sup>Yahweh God took Man and placed him in the garden of Eden to till it and take care of it. <sup>16</sup>Then Yahweh God gave an order to Man saying, "You may eat of every tree in the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you will not eat, for on the day you eat of it, you will die."

<sup>18</sup>Yahweh God said, "It is not good for Man to be alone; I will give him a helper who will be like him." <sup>19</sup>Then Yahweh God formed from the earth all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air and brought them to Man to see what he would call them; and whatever Man called every living creature, that was its name.

<sup>20</sup>So Man gave names to all the cattle, the birds of the air and to every

Ecl  
3:20  
12:7  
Ps  
104:  
29  
Job  
34:14  
1Cor  
15:45  
Ezk  
47:12  
Pro  
3:18  
Rev  
2:7  
22:2

Wis  
1:12  
Rom  
6:23

times, it was the opposite: the husband was the one who entered into the woman's clan. In fact, both are running the risk of separating themselves from the family milieu in order to establish a new social unity.

*They become one flesh:* in Hebrew it means that they form one single being. This union of the couple is part of their mission. It is not a provisional agreement to enjoy each other, but the union of a family in which God's work is accomplished. Therefore the family will be fruitful and the two will give back to the large human family the treasure of humanity which they received from it.

We cannot reread this phrase without recalling the way it will be taken up in the Gospel (Mt 19:15). Jesus' words on marriage are among his least understood words.

Yet the will of God was clear in this ancient text: the years of common life, the efforts to listen to each other, to understand and make decisions together, the capacity to forgive and persevere in fidelity, the shared risk in giving birth and educating a family: those are the means which, little by little, transform the man and the woman, enabling them to gain maturity and a sense of their responsibility. And it is precisely that which God wishes to find in them at the end of their life when he will be all for all.

*They were naked and were not ashamed.* In Hebraic culture, nakedness leaves us defenseless. Thus here, we should understand that the man and the woman accept each other as they are without taking advantage of their respective weaknesses.

#### THE BIBLE AND EVOLUTION

We already know that this account does not, in any way, claim to describe the emergence of the human race and so, it cannot be in conflict with science. If we ask today: What was the pre-history of the human race? How is the race connected to other forms of animal life? These are questions that people did not ask and the Word of God provides no answer on the subject. God lets us look for ourselves and this in fact is what scientists do.

Some people are shocked that humankind should be drawn from mud; yet in the literature of the ancient East, all the gods created living beings from mud. The author of this narrative followed the folklore of his time and drawing on old legends, gave them a new meaning.

Other people are so impressed by materialistic theories – already quite outdated – and their use of evolution, that we have to say something about it here.

When Christians think they see opposition between faith and the vision of a world in evolution, it usually comes from the fact that they are confusing three very different questions:

1. Is there an evolution of the entire universe and in particular of living beings? Can we say that all the present or extinct species are part of a same family and come one from the other? Today all who have studied the facts reply affirmatively.

2. What are the causes of such an evolution? The causes of some small evolutions are known,

beast of the field. But he did not find among them a helper like himself. <sup>21</sup>Then Yahweh God caused a deep sleep to come over Man and he fell asleep. He took one of his ribs and filled its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>The rib which Yahweh God had taken from Man he formed into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>The man then said, "Now this is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called woman because she was taken from man." <sup>24</sup>That is why man leaves his father and mother and is attached to his wife, and with her becomes one flesh. <sup>25</sup>Both the man and his wife were naked and were not ashamed.

15:12

1Cor 11:9  
1Tim 2:13

Mal 2:15  
Mt 19:5  
1Cor 6:16  
Eph 5:31

**The fall**

**3** <sup>1</sup>Now the serpent was the most crafty of all the wild creatures that Yahweh God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You must not eat from any tree in the garden?" <sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, "We

Wis 2:24  
Jn 8:44  
Rev 12:9  
20:2  
Rom 5:12

but so far it has been absolutely impossible to explain the most important evolution. From that is deduced the answer to the third question.

3. Are the theories of evolution opposed to faith? These theories are not science but philosophy or imagination, even if they have been formulated by eminent scientists. A believer or a materialist would have full liberty to support an opposing point of view.

One final observation. What is amazing for us is that everyone receives from God the spirit which makes a person in the image of God. It is not so important that we owe our body to human parents while the first humans inherited theirs from animal ancestors. God is the one who gives the impulse and orientation to the whole evolution of living beings so that Man would appear in the end, the human one who, in fact, is first in God's plan.

*A PROPHETIC MESSAGE*

As we mentioned in the first chapter, in these ancient texts the New Testament will discover all that will become clear "in Christ." If Adam represents the whole human race, one in its origin and also in its destiny, then Christ is the authentic Adam. From the beginning of creation God has blessed this race where each one has his/her own unique characteristics and yet is inseparable from the whole (Eph 1:1). Our first human ancestor deserves a charitable remembrance, but it is another who counts, who is "Man," he who gives us the Spirit (1 Cor 15:45-49).

may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said: You must not eat, and you must not touch it or you will die." <sup>4</sup>The serpent said to the woman, "You will not die, <sup>5</sup>but God knows that the day you eat it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil."

<sup>6</sup>The woman saw that the fruit was good to eat, and pleasant to the eyes, and ideal for gaining knowledge. She took its fruit and ate it and gave some to her husband who was with her. He ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then their eyes were opened and both of them knew they were naked. So they sewed leaves of a fig tree together and made themselves loin-cloths.

<sup>8</sup>They heard the voice of Yahweh God walking in the garden, in the cool of the day, and they, the man and his wife, hid from Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

As for the human couple, they are presented as the authentic image of a God who is eternal communion. By creating the couple, God allows us to understand something of the mystery of Christ who presents himself to all of humanity as the "Bridegroom" (Mk 2:19). From the side of Adam asleep, Eve was born; from the side of Christ, dead on the cross, blood and water flowed (Jn 19:34) which means the birth of a church cleansed through the water of baptism and the blood of Christ (Eph 5:26, 31).

- **3.1** The second part of the Eden story shows us the second aspect of human destiny. After chapter 2 which presented God's plan, what he wants for us, chapter 3 gives the reality, the actual human condition, and it asks the question: whose fault is it?

*The serpent was the most crafty.* In the literature of the Middle East, a snake was an evil creature but also endowed with divine powers. Evil does not come from God, nor from another God rival of the first, but from an important character of the higher world, like Satan in the book of Job (Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44).

Temptation will hide itself in the conquest of wisdom. Let us recall that at the time the verb *to eat* was used to indicate learning by heart, through repetition, some words from the wise: *we eat* the fruits of wisdom (Pro 9:5; Sir 24:26). The tree of knowledge is the art of living and wealth (see 1 K 3:11) and freedom is seen as the open gate to good and evil, life and death (Dt 30:15). Thus God placed human beings in a



Rev 3:18  
16:15

<sup>9</sup>Yahweh God called the man saying to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He said, “I heard your voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” <sup>11</sup>God said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree I ordered you not to eat?” <sup>12</sup>The man answered, “The woman you put with me gave me fruit from the tree and

I ate it.” <sup>13</sup>God said to the woman, “What have you done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me and I ate.” 2Cor 11:3

### The judgment of God

• <sup>14</sup>Yahweh God said to the serpent, “Since you have done that, be cursed among all the cattle and wild beasts! You will crawl on your belly and eat dust Mic 7:17

conflictive situation when he set wisdom within their reach while telling them: You are not to touch it. They will first have to forgo trying to seize it.

The account distinguishes three moments: temptation, sin and judgment.

Temptation. The serpent repeats to humans what is true: nothing is too great for them. At the same time he leads them to doubt God.

Then comes sin. How strange this conversation of three! It is the woman’s wish, and it is man who commits the real sin. The woman temptress – isn’t this the reality, especially in a world where she is relegated to an inferior state? Perhaps the author in this remote age witnessed the exploitation of women and the art of exploited people to manage their masters. Seeing that suffering was unevenly shared he concluded that the woman was the first to be unfaithful. God will not accept man’s excuses.

Two details ironically express the sinner’s disappointment. *Your eyes will be opened*: and they knew they were naked. *You will know good and evil*: and they did not go beyond evil.

*They hid... from God*. The fear of God appears as a consequence of the sin.

Other biblical texts dealing with these themes:  
The ancient serpent: Wis 2:24; Jn 8:44; 2 Cor 11:3; Rev 12:17.

The false concept of an envious God: Mic 6:7; Job 10:13; Mt 25:24.

Rebellion against God: Is 14:14; Ezk 28:2; Dn 11:36; Lk 15:11; 2 Thes 2:4.

Temptation: Mt 4; 6:13; Sir 15:11; Rom 7:8; 1 Cor 10:13; James 1:13.

### ADAM AND THE PRODIGAL SON

This sin of Adam opening up sacred history must be re-examined in the light of the Gospel, and more specifically, in the story of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11). This parable is much more than a reminder of God’s infinite mercy for the sinner who turns to him: it tells us what the human adventure is in the eyes of God, that of a prodigal son. While in Genesis, Adam stays with the discovery of his sin, in the parable he discovers he is a son.

Jesus is the Son and he makes us sons and daughters: he frees us in this way.

• 14. God’s judgment is a way of saying what our condition is... Adam lives his life away from God in suffering and contradiction. His disgrace will defile the better part of his existence:

– giving birth and educating children;  
– the relationship between husband and wife, with the stronger one dominating the other;  
– work becomes a burden.

*Be cursed...* God curses the serpent but not humankind. God’s original plan cannot fail: happiness and peace are at the end, but we will only reach this through a history that is disconcerting and often seems a failure (1 Cor 1:21): that will be redemption with Jesus and by Jesus.

*He will crush your head*. The biblical author was thinking of the slow victory of God’s people over evil: the woman’s descendants always wounded but led by God to new hope. The hope of a definitive victory over evil gives life to all biblical history and it is that which keeps us alert in today’s world where all is programmed to drug us until the day death adjusts everything.

Adam gives a name to his wife, the promise of a new starting point but also sign of authority. On the other hand, God inaugurates the long series of his “blessings,” to speak as the bible does. And so, God gives Adam and Eve the loincloth now necessary for their dignity. But this is the time to recall that we have to invert the apparent order of the account: the beginning of history, paradise, pictured the end for which God created us, and now the mortality of Adam expresses our reality on earth. So Adam’s weakness and his death are part of God’s plan of salvation. Our lives will be an ongoing ascent from Adam’s life – animal and mortal – toward sanctity and the incorruptibility of another Adam, Christ (1 Cor 15:45).

### DO NOT TAKE EVERYTHING LITERALLY

We have already mentioned that the author of these pages took some characters from ancient tales, for example, the serpent. He also preserved some strange expressions, like the following: *the man has become like one of us...* in which it would seem that God is afraid of human competition. The author did not feel it necessary to clarify these ambiguous expressions which came directly from the pagan legend. The same goes for the *cherubim* and the *flaming sword* which referred to certain figures posted at the entrance of cities to keep the evil spirits away. Here, these figures show that humankind is *under the wrath of God* (Eph 2:3): that is to say that humankind is expecting to be reconciled with God.

### ORIGINAL SIN

Adam and his sin will not be mentioned again in any Old Testament book except for a brief

Rev 12:7 all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup>I will make you enemies, you and the woman, your offspring and her offspring. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.”

35:16 Jn 16:21 Rev 12:1 Eph 5:22 <sup>16</sup>To the woman, God said, “I will increase your suffering in childbearing, and you will give birth to your children in pain. You will be dependent on your husband and he will lord it over you.”

Jer 12:4 Hos 4:3 Rom 8:20 <sup>17</sup>To the man, He said, “Because you have listened to your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I forbade you to eat, cursed be the soil because of you! In suffering you will provide food

for yourself from it, all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup>It will produce thorn and thistle for you and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>With sweat on your face you will eat your bread, until you return to clay, since it was from clay that you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup>The man called his wife by the name of Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. <sup>21</sup>Yahweh God made garments of skin for the man and his wife, and with these he clothed them.

<sup>22</sup>Then Yahweh God said, “Man has

Is 11:6  
Ecl 2:22-23  
Job 7  
Ps 90:3  
104:29  
Job 3  
Rom 5:12

reference in Wis 10:1 (Sir 25:24 is somewhat of a joke). But what this story teaches, is that all of us, some more some less, are unfaithful to God in a thousand ways. We see Israel, chosen by God, making a golden calf for its god (Ex 32); we see Moses, the great Moses, who doubts God and does not respond to him (Num 20); we see David, God’s chosen one, a murderer and an adulterer (2 S 11); we see the kingdom of Israel breaking up after it barely began (1 K 12). And each time we reach the same conclusion: God keeps his promises, but the whole future is to be marked by suffering and death.

So the sin of Adam is not just another sin, older than our own rebellion, to be added – without our wanting it – to our own offences; it is rather another way of looking at the sin of our race. Here is what the author has understood in pondering the events of Israel’s past: our sins are neither isolated nor individual. Each one of us from birth, and even before birth, has been immersed in a world of violence and ignorance of God (Ps 51:7): our relatives, our culture, our first experiences have taught us to sin. “Adam” is made of all this interconnectedness.

Not a word about Adam and his sin in the gospels: just a hint to the evil murderer in Jn 8:44 and nothing in all of the New Testament – other than Paul’s letter to the Christians of Rome. There, however, this story takes center stage again. See the commentary of Rom 5:12.

This important text of Paul (Rom 5) is at the root of Christian statements on the “sin of the human race” which later would be called “original sin.” The statement is twofold: on one hand, all of us together are involved in a rebellion against God that leaves its imprint from age to age; on the other hand, not one of us is a child of God by nature: we are all in need of reconciliation. God takes the first step and saves us through Christ.

All that goes far beyond what was said in Genesis 3: it is a way of re-reading the text in the eyes of people believing in Christ and faith in the salvation he brings to the world. Even so the intuitions of Genesis have not been abandoned. The author of this story like ourselves is trying to

reply to the question: Why is there evil in the world? and why are the children of Adam sinners? He replies by saying that evil comes from disobedience to God, but he also clearly states that evil has come from a very important person in creation. We already meet in the first pages of the Bible an affirmation which today is a subject of ridicule for many Christians: the world is under the control of Satan, devil or demon – the one John calls “the governor of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30) who is in fact a spiritual superpower associated with God Creator.

Was Paul mistaken when he affirmed that God’s plan with the coming of his Son-made-man – human, earthly, about to be tortured – was a scandal to every creature, beginning with both the occult and luminous powers that govern this world (1 Cor 1:8; Col 2:15)? This gave rise to the ancient catechetical texts, now fairly dusty, after so many years, affirming the “sin of the angels” – a durable affirmation in Jewish tradition. There had been a revolt of the greatest of the spiritual beings knowing that God would circumvent him by coming and establishing himself at the lowest point of the universe and from there to “draw all to himself” (Jn 12:32).

*THE WOMAN – THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION*

In speaking of the woman’s offspring, the author was thinking of people who struggle against evil and are constantly wounded, but are victorious in the end.

But, later biblical writers referred more and more to a conqueror, the Son of Man, the protagonist of the decisive battle.

The *Woman* is humankind, giving birth to the Savior, to its Savior, and made fruitful through the grace of God (Is 45:8). Revelation 12 will also speak of the Woman. This figure refers to Mary as well as to the Church since both Mary and the Church have entered into the divine marriage: Jesus was born of Mary. In its turn, the Church is the mother of all those who are born of water and of the Spirit, and who become members of the Body of Christ, which gradually extends to all people.

now become like one of us, making himself judge of good and evil. Let him not stretch out his hand to take and eat from the tree of Life as well, and live forever.”<sup>23</sup> So God cast him from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been made.<sup>24</sup> And after

Rev  
22:1

having driven the man out, God posted cherubim and a flaming sword that kept turning at the east of the garden of Eden to guard the way to the tree of Life.

### Cain and Abel

**4** • <sup>1</sup> Adam had intercourse with Eve his wife; she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. She named him Cain, for she said, “*I have got a man with help from Yahweh.*”<sup>2</sup> She later gave birth to Abel, his brother. Abel was a shepherd and kept flocks, and Cain tilled the soil.

<sup>3</sup> It happened after a time that Cain brought fruits of the soil as an offering to Yahweh. <sup>4</sup> Abel for his part brought the firstborn of his flock, and some fat as well. Now Yahweh was well pleased

Ex  
34:19

In art Mary is represented as crushing the head of the serpent to express that God preserved her from the evil affecting our race. Even more: in her case, God did not want the lapse of time when human freedom is blind between the first instant of her conception and the first manifestation of God the Father. So, from the beginning he prepared her with the fullness of his grace so that her entire life would be established and develop in a perfect filial spirit. This privilege of Mary is what we call her *Immaculate Conception*.

Mary is the perfect creature, inseparable from the Son of the Woman, Jesus Christ. God placed her amidst a multitude of sinners whom she was to help. A *Woman* (Jn 2:4; 19:26) is the model of all those who would be saved. Mary is the new Eve and *the Mother* of the disciples of Jesus (Jn 19:26).

• **4.1** The story of Cain, a religious story, like the story of earthly Paradise, teaches us the depth of the human condition, by way of comparison. It shows violence as a decisive factor in our history, with its roots deep in the human heart (4:7) and its first victims those who, like Abel, are pleasing to God (4:4). Abel’s spilled blood cries out to God (4:10) who does justice in his way, not as we would with vengeance and violence (4:15).

Originally Cain’s story had nothing to do with

with Abel and his offering,<sup>5</sup> but towards Cain and his offering he showed no pleasure. This made Cain very angry and downcast.

Heb  
11:4

<sup>6</sup> Then Yahweh said to Cain, “Why are you angry and downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do right, why do you not look up? But if you are not doing what is right, sin is lurking at the door. It is striving to get you, but you must control it.”

<sup>8</sup> Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let’s go to the fields.” Once there, Cain turned on his brother Abel and killed him. <sup>9</sup> Yahweh said to Cain, “Where is your brother, Abel?” He answered, “I don’t know; am I my brother’s keeper?”

Wis  
10:3  
1Jn  
3:12

<sup>10</sup> Yahweh asked, “What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground. <sup>11</sup> Now be cursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood that your hand has shed. <sup>12</sup> When you till the soil, it will no longer yield you its produce. You will be a fugitive wandering on the earth.”

Mt  
25:35  
Heb  
12:24

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to Yahweh, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> See!

the story of Adam and Eve and their descendants. The biblical author who took the story and placed it here, related it to the previous one by fictitiously making Cain become Adam’s son. (There is, therefore, no room for questions about whom Cain and Abel married: the Bible does not intend to relate the beginnings of the human race.)

This is like the national history of the tribe of the *Cainites* (or *Kenites*: Jdg 1:16; 4:17) who became part of Israel. As often related in ancient legends, Cain, the founder of the tribe, had killed his brother, who could become his rival, since that was the only way to establish political authority. Later, a society with different functions saw the light (4:19-22); then Lamech would become the spokesman of national pride (4:23); the people would learn how to get even with aggressors.

In borrowing this legend the biblical author gave it another meaning and inserted a dialogue between God and Cain as judgment on violence: “You pretended to act justly: wrong! You have committed a crime.” It is like us saying: “You who pretend to serve the sacred interests of the nation, how long will you eliminate and expel those who do not agree with you?”

In the Bible, Abel is the first and the model of innocent victims who are murdered. This and other passages suggest that they are eliminated because they are just people (Mt 23:35; Heb 11:4; Jn 8:44; 1 Jn 3:12).

Today you drive me from this land. I must hide from you and be a wanderer and a fugitive on the earth, and it will so happen that whoever meets me will kill me.” <sup>15</sup>Yahweh said to him, “Well then, whoever kills Cain, will suffer vengeance seven times.” And Yahweh put a mark on Cain to prevent anyone who met him from killing him.

Ezk  
9:4  
Rev  
7:3  
9:4

<sup>16</sup>Cain then went from Yahweh’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden.

**The descendants of Cain and Seth**

• <sup>17</sup>Cain had intercourse with his wife; she conceived and gave birth to Enosh. As he was building a town, he called it by the name of his son, Enoch. <sup>18</sup>A son, Irad, was born to Enoch. Irad became father of Mehujael, and Mehujael of Metusael, and Metusael of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup>Lamech had two wives, Adah and Zillah. <sup>20</sup>Adah gave birth to Jabel: he was father to those who live in tents and keep flocks. <sup>21</sup>His brother was Jubal: he was father to all those who play the lyre and flute. <sup>22</sup>As for Zillah, she gave birth to Tubal-Cain, forger of all tools in bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

Ex  
21:23 <sup>23</sup>Lamech said to his wives:  
“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
wives of Lamech, listen to what I say,  
for I killed a man for wounding me  
and a boy for striking me.

Mt  
18:22 <sup>24</sup>If Cain will be avenged seven times,  
then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

Ex  
3:14 <sup>25</sup>Adam again had intercourse with his wife and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth; for she said, “Yahweh has given me another child *in place of* Abel since Cain killed him.” <sup>26</sup>To Seth also a son was born and he called him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of Yahweh.

**The descendants of Adam**

**5** <sup>1</sup>*This is the account of Adam’s descendants. When God created Adam he made him in the likeness of God;* <sup>2</sup>*male and*

*female he created them; he blessed them and called them Man on the day they were created.*

<sup>3</sup>*Adam was a hundred and thirty years old when he became father of a son born in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth.* <sup>4</sup>*After the birth of Seth, Adam lived for eight hundred years and had other sons and daughters.* <sup>5</sup>*Altogether Adam lived nine hundred and thirty years; then he died.*

<sup>6</sup>*When Seth was a hundred and five, he became father of Enosh.* <sup>7</sup>*After the birth of Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years. He had other sons and daughters.* <sup>8</sup>*Altogether Seth lived nine hundred and twelve years; then he died.*

<sup>9</sup>*When Enosh was ninety years old, he became the father of Kenan.* <sup>10</sup>*After the birth of Kenan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and he had other sons and daughters.* <sup>11</sup>*Altogether Enosh lived nine hundred and five years; then he died.*

<sup>12</sup>*When Kenan was seventy years old, he became father of Mahalalel.* <sup>13</sup>*After the birth of Mahalalel, Kenan lived eight hundred and forty years, and he had other sons and daughters.* <sup>14</sup>*Altogether Kenan lived nine hundred and ten years; then he died.*

<sup>15</sup>*When Mahalalel was sixty-five, he became the father of Jared.* <sup>16</sup>*After that, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had other sons and daughters.* <sup>17</sup>*All the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; then he died.* <sup>18</sup>*When Jared was a hundred and sixty-two, he became father of Enoch.* <sup>19</sup>*After the birth of Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters.* <sup>20</sup>*Altogether Jared lived nine hundred and sixty-two years; then he died.*

<sup>21</sup>*When Enoch was sixty-five, he became father of Methuselah.* <sup>22</sup>*After the birth of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and he had other sons and daughters.* <sup>23</sup>*In all Enoch lived three hundred and sixty-five years.* <sup>24</sup>*After Enoch had walked with God, he disappeared because God took him up.*

• <sup>25</sup>*When Methuselah was a hundred and eighty-seven, he became father of Lamech.*

Heb  
11:5  
2 K  
2:11  
Sir  
44:16

• 17. The sacred authors inserted between the origins of the world and the beginning of their own history (the call to Abraham) what they knew about the past of humankind. They knew it in their own way through traditions and legends.

• 5.25 *Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years!* It was absolutely essential to give the idea of a long stretch of time from the beginning of the world up to the ancestors of the

people of God, and names could not be multiplied. Just as the Babylonians before the flood had placed eleven kings with a fabulous life duration, the Israelites needed a few Methuselah. Besides they held that their distant ancestors had been better than themselves and for that reason had been rewarded with a very long life.

In this legendary list of the ancestors of humankind appears the name of *Enoch* the just one, whom God took up to heaven just as he did with Elijah (2 Kgs 2).

<sup>26</sup> After the birth of Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>27</sup> In all Methuselah lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years; then he died.

<sup>28</sup> Lamech was a hundred and eighty-two when he became father of a son <sup>29</sup> and named him Noah, for he said, "He will console us in the hard toil and suffering of our hands, because of the soil that was cursed by Yahweh. <sup>30</sup> After the birth of Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and he had other sons and daughters. <sup>31</sup> In all Lamech lived seven hundred and seventy-seven years; then he died.

<sup>32</sup> When Noah was five hundred years old, he became the father of Sem, Ham and Japheth.

**Sons of God and daughters of men**

**6** • <sup>1</sup> When people began to increase on the earth and daughters were born to them, <sup>2</sup> the sons of God saw that men's daughters were very beautiful, so they married those they chose. <sup>3</sup> Yahweh then said, "My spirit will not remain in man forever, for he is flesh. His span of life will be one hundred and twenty years." <sup>4</sup> At that time there were giants on the earth, and afterwards as well, when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. These were the heroes of old, men of renown.

**The flood**

• <sup>5</sup> Yahweh saw how great was the

wickedness of man on the earth and that evil was always the only thought of his heart. <sup>6</sup> Yahweh regretted having created man on the earth and his heart grieved. <sup>7</sup> He said, "I will destroy man whom I created and blot him out from the face of the earth, as well as the beasts, creeping creatures and birds, for I am sorry I made them." <sup>8</sup> But Noah was pleasing to God.

<sup>9</sup> This is the story of Noah. Noah was a just man, blameless among the people of his time, a man who walked with God. <sup>10</sup> Noah became the father of three sons: Shem, Ham and Japheth. <sup>11</sup> The earth became corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence. <sup>12</sup> God saw the earth and saw it was corrupt, for corrupt, indeed, was the way of all mortals.

<sup>13</sup> Yahweh said to Noah, "I have in mind to destroy all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. This is why I will destroy them and with them the earth. <sup>14</sup> As for you, build an ark of cypress wood. You will make rooms in the ark and coat it with pitch inside and outside. <sup>15</sup> This is the way you will do it: the length of the ark, four hundred and fifty feet; the width, seventy-five feet; the height, forty-five feet. <sup>16</sup> You will put a roof on the ark and finish it within eighteen inches from the top. Put a door in the side of the ark and have lower, middle and upper decks. <sup>17</sup> I am about to bring floodwa-

the storm and build anew. But whole sections of our culture that are deeply tainted will collapse so that the self-sufficiency stamped in our humanism may disappear: we must recognize our need for a savior.

According to Noah's story, this is God's intention with the Flood, except that God does not destroy everything. He saves Noah, the just one, so that a holy race may spring from him. Throughout sacred history God will bring the worst disasters on his unfaithful people, but he will always preserve a Remnant (Is 4:2-6; 6:13).

This is how God chooses Noah from all the sons of Adam; later he will choose Abraham from among Noah's descendants; then David from Abraham's sons and, finally, one of David's sons, Christ, the representative and Savior of all humanity. The Bible brings out this contrast: while the sin present in our roots extends to all people and frustrates the progress of civilization, God focuses all his attention on a single people, a single family, and a single man who will save everyone (Rom 5).

Like Noah, the believer is a person who willingly enters into God's plans and cooperates with him in the salvation of the world. It is not enough to say: "I have my faith." Will this faith of mine lead me to sacrifice myself to change the world? Unlike the negligent, the lazy and the corrupt, Noah, the man of faith, begins to work

Ps 29:1  
Job 1:6  
Dt 2:10  
Sir 16:7  
Bar 3:26  
Ps 14:2  
Jer 5:1

Mt 24:37  
1P 3:20  
1S 15:35  
Ex 32:12  
Jer 18:8  
Jon 4:2  
Sir 44:17  
Heb 11:7  
2P 2:5  
1P 3:20  
Ps 29:10  
93:2

ters on the earth to destroy the earth, to destroy all life under the heavens, every creature that has the breath of life. Everything on earth will perish, <sup>18</sup> but I will establish my covenant with you. You shall come into the ark, you, your wife, your sons and your sons' wives with you. <sup>19</sup> You shall bring into the ark two of every kind of living thing, male and female, to keep them alive with you. <sup>20</sup> Of the birds, the animals and all creeping things on the ground, according to their kind, two of every sort shall come in to be kept alive with you.

<sup>21</sup> Take with you every sort of food that is eaten. Make a store of it and it will be food for you and them."

<sup>22</sup> And Noah did all as God had commanded him.

**7** <sup>1</sup>Yahweh said to Noah, "Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I see that you are just in this generation. <sup>2</sup>Of all the clean animals, you are to take with you seven of each kind, male and female, and a pair of unclean animals, a male and a female. <sup>3</sup>In the same way for the birds of the air, take seven and seven, male and female, to keep their kind alive over all the earth, <sup>4</sup>for in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights. I will blot out from the face of the earth all the living creatures I have created."

<sup>5</sup>Noah did all as Yahweh had commanded. <sup>6</sup>Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters covered the earth.

<sup>7</sup>So Noah went into the ark with his children, his wife and his sons' wives to escape the waters of the flood. <sup>8</sup>Clean

animals and also unclean, birds, and all that crawls on the earth went into the ark with Noah; <sup>9</sup>they went two and two, male and female, as God had commanded Noah. <sup>10</sup>And after seven days the waters of the flood were over the earth.

<sup>11</sup> In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month and on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep burst forth <sup>12</sup>and there was a downpour on the earth lasting forty days and forty nights. <sup>13</sup>On that same day Noah went into the ark, as well as Shem, Ham and Japheth, his sons, and his wife and his daughters-in-law. <sup>14</sup>All the animals according to their kind also entered into the ark, all the cattle, all the creeping things that crawl on the earth and all the birds according to their kind; all that flies and everything with wings. <sup>15</sup>They came to Noah in the ark, two by two, all creatures that had the breath of life in them. <sup>16</sup>And they that went in were male and female just as God had commanded.

Then Yahweh closed the door on Noah. <sup>17</sup>The flood lasted for forty days on the earth. The waters rose and lifted the ark and raised it above the earth.

<sup>18</sup> The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth and the ark floated on the surface of the waters.

<sup>19</sup> The water rose more and more above the earth and all the high mountains under the heavens were submerged. <sup>20</sup> The waters had risen and covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet. <sup>21</sup> Every living thing that moved on the earth died: birds, cattle, animals, everything that swarmed on the earth – and all humankind.

Wis  
10:4  
2P  
2:5  
Lev  
11

Mt  
24:37

and does not doubt or become discouraged while building his ridiculous and apparently useless boat.

The time comes when God eliminates the unprepared, those who preferred to enjoy life now rather than work for a future God pointed out to them (Mic 3:9-12; Zep 2:1-3; Mt 24:38).

Noah's story has its source in very old legends. It was put in writing for the first time in the days of King Solomon. At a much later date the Jewish priests added the paragraphs indicated in the text by smaller italics.

The story of the flood is recalled in several places in the New Testament (see 1 P 3:20 and 2 P 2:5). This story teaches us that God wants to renew our sinful world. For that to be accomplished, we need a process of purification and we need to look at not only our evil habits but the very roots of our culture. To begin with, we must

let go of our pride and admit that we need a Savior.

In some way, the Church is this Ark which we enter through faith and baptism and where we are welcomed by Christ, the new Noah. It would obviously be wrong to lock ourselves in the Church as in a refuge of the saved and from there to condemn everything taking place in the world, forgetting that our mission is to save the world (Jn 3:17). Yet, we must not forget that the Church is the only hope of the world and nothing can enter the Kingdom without passing through purifying and destroying waters.

*Never again will I curse the earth because of man.* With these words the Bible assures us that human errors and crimes cannot lead to chaos. Not only will the sun give its warmth and the earth its bread, but in every century, humankind will find a solution to its problems.

<sup>22</sup> All on the face of the earth that had the breath of life in its nostrils died.

<sup>23</sup> Every living being on the face of the earth, humans and animals, and creatures that crawl and the birds of the air were wiped off the earth. Only Noah was left and those that were with him in the ark.

Ezk  
14:14

**8** <sup>24</sup> The waters flooded the earth for one hundred and fifty days. <sup>1</sup> Then God remembered Noah and all the animals and cattle that were with him in the ark. God made a wind blow over the earth and the waters subsided.

<sup>2</sup> Then the fountains of the deep and the floodgates of the heavens were closed and the downpour from the heavens held back.

<sup>3</sup> The waters receded from the earth and after one hundred and fifty days the waters had abated. <sup>4</sup> In the seventh month, in the seventeenth day of the month, the ark rested on Mount Ararat. <sup>5</sup> The waters continued to recede until the tenth month. On the first day of the tenth month the mountain tops could be seen.

<sup>6</sup> At the end of the forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had built <sup>7</sup> and let the raven out. This went off and kept flying to and fro until the waters had dried up from the earth.

<sup>8</sup> Then Noah let out the dove to see if the waters were receding from the earth. <sup>9</sup> But the dove could not find a place to set its foot and flew back to him in the ark for the waters still covered the surface of the whole earth. So Noah stretched out his hand, took hold of it and brought it back to himself in the ark. <sup>10</sup> He waited some more days and again sent the dove out from the ark. <sup>11</sup> This time the dove came back to him in the evening with a fresh olive branch in its beak.

Then Noah knew the waters had receded from the earth. <sup>12</sup> He waited seven more days and let the dove loose, but it did not return to him any more.

<sup>13</sup> In the year six hundred and one, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and looked out and saw that the surface of the earth was dry. <sup>14</sup> On the twenty-seventh day of the second month, the earth was dry.

<sup>15</sup> Then God said to Noah, <sup>16</sup> "Come out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you. <sup>17</sup> Bring out with you all flesh, that is, all the animals who are with you, all things of flesh; birds, cattle and all that crawls on the earth. Let them abound on the earth, be fruitful and increase in number." <sup>18</sup> So Noah went out, with his sons, his wife and his sons' wives with him. <sup>19</sup> All the animals, all the birds, all that creeps on the earth, came out of the ark, one kind after another.

<sup>20</sup> Noah built an altar to Yahweh and, taking some of all the clean animals and all the clean birds, he offered burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup> Yahweh smelled the pleasing aroma and said to himself: "Never again will I curse the earth because of man, even though his heart is set on evil from childhood; never again will I strike down every living creature as I have done.

<sup>22</sup> As long as the earth lasts,  
seedtime and harvest,  
cold and heat,  
summer and winter,  
day and night,  
shall not cease to be."

Jer  
31:35  
33:20

#### The new world order

**9** <sup>1</sup> God blessed Noah and his sons and he said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup> Fear and dread of you will be in all the animals of the earth and in all the birds of the air, upon everything that creeps

1:28

• **9.1** God's blessing on Noah and his children (that is on all humankind) serves as a commentary on the previous promise. Let us note the following points:

Man is confirmed in his role as steward of creation (9:2).

He may eat the flesh of animals (9:3), but not their blood (compare with 1:29) because for the Hebrews blood was thought to contain the soul,

that is the life of a living being. Thus, to eat the flesh of animals without first draining the blood was considered as profaning the very sacredness of life (see Lev 17:10-14).

The covenant of God with humankind (v. 8) and with everything that came from the Ark, means that God is interested in everything that people create: their culture, inventions, as well as their legitimate ambitions. God is not only the

1:29 on the ground and all the fish of the sea. They are given to you.<sup>3</sup> Everything that moves and lives shall be food for you; as I gave you the green plants, I have now given you everything.<sup>4</sup> Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood.

Lev 17:11  
Acts 15:20  
Rom 14  
<sup>5</sup> But I will also demand a reckoning for your lifeblood. I will demand it from every animal; and from man, too, I will demand a reckoning for the life of his fellow man.

Ex 12:23  
<sup>6</sup> He who sheds the blood of man shall have his blood shed by man; for in the image of God has God made man.

<sup>7</sup> As for you, be fruitful and increase. Abound on the earth and be master of it.”

6:18  
Sir 44:17  
Hos 2:20  
Jon 4:11  
<sup>8</sup> God spoke to Noah and his son, <sup>9</sup> “See I am making a covenant with you and with your descendants after you; <sup>10</sup> also with every living animal with you: birds, cattle, that is, with every living creature of the earth that came out of the ark. <sup>11</sup> I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

<sup>12</sup> God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I make between me and you, and every animal living with you for all future generations. <sup>13</sup> I set my bow in the clouds and it will be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. <sup>14</sup> When I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, <sup>15</sup> I will remember the covenant between me and you and every kind of living creature, so that never again will floodwaters destroy all flesh. <sup>16</sup> When the rainbow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of every kind that exists on the earth.” <sup>17</sup> God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant I have made between me and all that has life on the earth.”

#### Noah and his sons

Ezk 1:28  
Rev 4:3  
Is 54:9  
• <sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham is the ancestor of Canaan. <sup>19</sup> These were

Noah’s three sons and from them the whole earth was peopled.

Pro 23:30  
Sir 31:25  
Eph 5:18  
<sup>20</sup> Noah, a man of the soil, set about planting a vineyard. <sup>21</sup> He drank the wine, became drunk, and lay uncovered in the middle of his tent. <sup>22</sup> When Ham, Canaan’s ancestor, saw his father’s nakedness, he told his two brothers outside the tent. <sup>23</sup> But Shem and Japheth took a cloak, put it on their shoulders, the two of them, then walked backwards and covered their father’s nakedness. Their faces were turned away and they did not see their father’s nakedness.

<sup>24</sup> When Noah awoke from his wine he knew what his youngest son had done to him. <sup>25</sup> And he said, “Cursed be Canaan! He shall be his brothers’ meanest slave!”

<sup>26</sup> He then added: “Blessed be Yahweh, God of Shem, let Canaan be his slave! <sup>27</sup> May God extend (the territory of) Japheth, and may he live in the tents of Shem! And may Canaan be his slave!”

<sup>28</sup> Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood. <sup>29</sup> In all Noah lived for nine hundred and fifty years. Then he died.

#### The list of nations

Wis 10:5  
Acts 2:6  
Rev 7:9  
Jer 51:53  
Is 14:12  
**10** • <sup>1</sup> These are the descendants of Noah’s sons. Shem, Ham and Japheth; these are their sons who were born after the flood. <sup>2</sup> Japheth’s sons: Gomer, Magog, the Medes, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, Tiras. <sup>3</sup> Gomer’s sons: Ashkenaz, Riphath, Togarmah. <sup>4</sup> Javan’s sons: Elishah, Tarshish, the Kittim, the Dananites. <sup>5</sup> These were dispersed and peopled the islands of the nations.

These were Japheth’s sons, according to their countries and each of their languages, according to their tribes and their nations.

<sup>6</sup> Ham’s sons: Cush, Misraim, Put, Canaan. <sup>7</sup> Cush’s sons: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, Sabteca. Raamah’s sons: Sheba, Dedan.

Acts 17:26  
Jn 11:52  
Acts 2  
<sup>8</sup> Cush became the father of Nimrod who was the first great ruler on earth. <sup>9</sup> He was a mighty hunter in the eyes of Yahweh, hence the saying, “Like Nimrod, a mighty hunter in

God of believers, he is the God of everyone. God does not want merely to save souls: through human creativity God enables people to grow in awareness and responsibility and he prepares them for divine union through the Holy Spirit.

God has not made himself known to all human groups as he has done for Israel and later for Christians. But to every human in every country, he gives signs of his providence and his goodness through daily events: this is what he expresses when he invites Noah’s descendants to see in the rainbow a reminder of his covenant with them (12).

I set my bow in the clouds. Hang up one’s bow was, at that time, making peace. The rainbow then is the sign of reconciliation between God and humankind.

• 18. In primitive cultures, those seeking supernatural experiences turned drunkenness into a sacred ritual. They believed there were vital forces in wine which would permit them to escape from the passage of time. The Bible accepts these concerns and prefers to honor Noah rather than to condemn him.

• **10.1** Noah’s three sons symbolically represent the three human groups which the Israelites believed formed humankind:

– Their group, blessed by God, the Semites (including Arabs, among others). They called their ancestor Shem, meaning “the Name,” the one who knows and keeps the Name, that is to say, the Presence of God.

– Another group, Japheth, including the



the eyes of Yahweh.” <sup>10</sup>The beginning of his empire was Babel, with Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. <sup>11</sup>From this country came Ashur, the builder of Niniveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, <sup>12</sup>and Resen between Niniveh and Calah (this is the great city).

<sup>13</sup>Misraim became the father of the people of Lud, of Anam, Lehab, Naphtuh, <sup>14</sup>Pathros, Cusluh and Capthor, from which the Philistines came.

<sup>15</sup>Canaan became the father of Sidon, his firstborn, the Hittites, <sup>16</sup>and the Jebusites, the Amorites, Girgashites, <sup>17</sup>Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, <sup>18</sup>Arvadites, Zemarites, Hamathites; later the Canaanite tribes scattered. <sup>19</sup>The Canaanite frontier stretched from Sidon in the direction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim, and as far as Lesha.

<sup>20</sup>These were Ham’s sons, according to their tribes and languages, according to their countries and nations.

<sup>21</sup>There were also children born to Shem, the ancestor of all the sons of Eber, who are the Hebrews, and the elder brother of Japheth.

<sup>22</sup>Shem’s sons: Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram. <sup>23</sup>Aram’s sons: Uz, Hul, Gether and Mash.

<sup>24</sup>Arpachshad became the father of Shelah, and Shelah became the father of Eber. <sup>25</sup>To Eber were born two sons: the first was called Peleg, because it was in his time that the earth was divided; and his brother was called Joktan. <sup>26</sup>Joktan became the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, <sup>27</sup>Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, <sup>28</sup>Obal, <sup>22:20</sup>Abimael, Sheba, <sup>29</sup>Ophir, Havilah, Jobab; all these are sons of Joktan. <sup>30</sup>They occupied a stretch of country from Mesh in the direction of Sephar, to the eastern mountain range.

<sup>31</sup>These were Shem’s sons, according to their tribes and languages, and according to their countries and nations.

<sup>32</sup>These were the tribes of Noah’s sons, according to their descendants and their nations. From these came the dispersal of the nations over the earth, after the flood.

### The tower of Babel

**11** • <sup>1</sup>The whole world had one language and a common speech. <sup>2</sup>As people moved from east, they found a plain in the country of Shinar where they settled.

<sup>3</sup>They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and bake them in fire.” They used brick for stone and bitumen for mortar. <sup>4</sup>They said also, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top reaching heaven; so that we may become a great people and not be scattered over the face of the earth!”

<sup>5</sup>Yahweh came down to see the city and the tower that the sons of man were building, <sup>6</sup>and Yahweh said, “They are one people and they have one language. If they carry this through, nothing they decide to do from now on will be impossible. <sup>7</sup>Come! Let us go down and confuse their language so that they will no longer understand each other.”

<sup>8</sup>So Yahweh scattered them over all the earth and they stopped building the city. <sup>9</sup>That is why it was called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the language of the whole earth and from there Yahweh scattered them over the whole face of the earth.

people of Europe, who were to form the Greek and Roman empires.

– The other group was that of the African people, especially Mizraim or Egypt and Cush or Ethiopia and also the Canaanites who occupied the Holy Land before its conquest by the Israelites. Since sexual immorality was quite frequent among the Canaanites, a lack of modesty is attributed to their ancestor Ham.

In this list of forefathers, names of legendary heroes are mixed with lists of people and cities as “sons” of this or that race. For example all those mentioned in verses 2-6 are people and tribes, not individuals.

• **11.1** It would be easy to show that the Tower of Babel story, reproduces in part, legends about Babel, or Babylon, the most famous capital of the time, with its brick buildings and its strange, unfinished-looking towers. In 11:7 the

biblical author retains an ambiguous expression from these pagan legends: the gods were afraid of the arrogance of humans who were threatening them in their celestial dwellings.

God has given us the mission to occupy the land and make it fruitful. People often prefer their own security to being creative.

The great projects for which the legitimate rights of millions of slaves have been lightly sacrificed remain unfinished. Resentment and oppression have contributed to irreparable divisions for the following generations or the next century.

God alone can bring us together: the first promise to Abraham was that he would gather all the nations around his offspring (Gen 12:3). When the Holy Spirit would come into the hearts of believers on Pentecost (Acts 2), he would enable them to understand one another in the unique language of love. One people: this will be

<sup>10</sup> These are Shem's descendants:

When Shem was a hundred years old he became the father of Arpachshad, two years after the flood. After the birth of Arpachshad, <sup>11</sup> Shem lived five hundred years and he had more sons and daughters.

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

<sup>14</sup> When Shelah was thirty years old he became the father of Eber. After the birth of Eber, <sup>15</sup> Shelah lived four hundred and three years and he had more sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup> When Eber was thirty-four years old he became the father of Peleg. After the birth of Peleg, <sup>17</sup> Eber lived four hundred and thirty years and he had more sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup> When Peleg was thirty years old he became the father of Reu; <sup>19</sup> Peleg lived two hundred and nine years and he had more sons and daughters.

<sup>20</sup> When Reu was thirty-two years old he became the father of Serug; <sup>21</sup> Reu lived two hundred and seven years and he had more sons and daughters.

<sup>22</sup> When Serug was thirty years old he

became the father of Nahor. After the birth of Nahor, <sup>23</sup> Serug lived two hundred years and he had more sons and daughters.

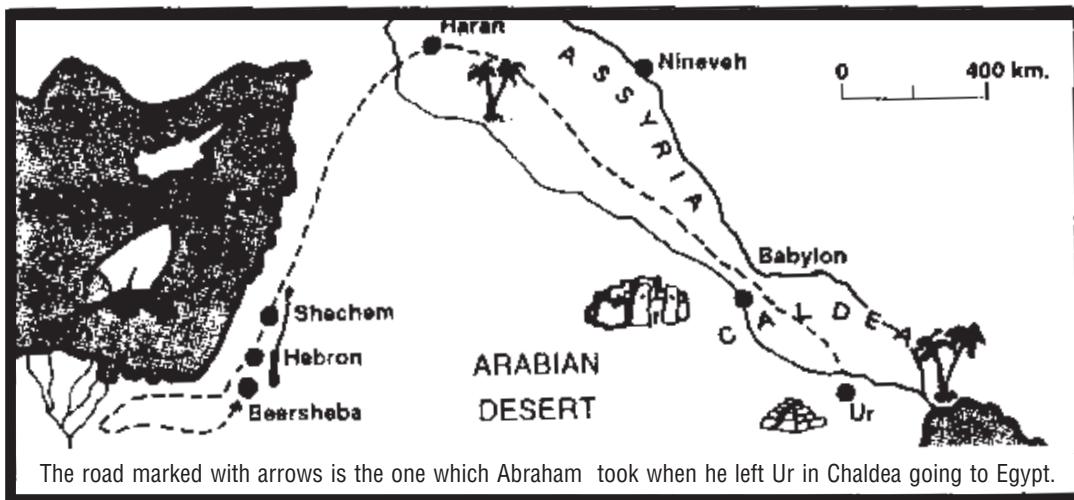
<sup>24</sup> When Nahor was twenty-nine years old he became the father of Terah. After the birth of Terah, <sup>25</sup> Nahor lived a hundred and nineteen years and he had more sons and daughters.

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

<sup>27</sup> These are Terah's descendants: Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.

Haran became the father of Lot. <sup>28</sup> Haran died before his father Terah in his native land, Ur of the Chaldeans. <sup>29</sup> Abram and Nahor both married: Abram's wife was called Sarai; Nahor's wife was called Milcah, the daughter of Haran, father of Milcah and Iscah. <sup>30</sup> Sarai was barren, having no child.

<sup>31</sup> Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot, the son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law, the wife of Abram, and made them leave Ur of the Chaldeans to go to the land of Canaan. But on arrival in Haran they settled there. <sup>32</sup> Terah lived two hundred and five years; then he died in Haran.



the Church. While the sinful work alone and develop an oppressive and sterile male-centered culture, the believer builds through intercommunication and communion in the same Spirit (Eph 2:14-22).

The diversity of human languages aroused interest at the time, as did the diversity of cultures. Today it is accepted that people have spoken for several tens of thousands of years; but language is continually in evolution, more so when there is no writing. At a time when fewer human groups, scattered over the continents, lived with little contact with one another, a few generations sufficed for languages to multiply infinitely.

• <sup>26</sup> Terah became the father of Abram. Abraham was at first called Abram. We must understand that the account of Abraham is not historical in every detail. It is like a faith book in which we are shown the most typical stages and trials which any believer goes through at one time or another in his life. We see these played out by Abraham.

On a map we can see the crescent formed by the fertile valleys of Mesopotamia and the plains of Canaan. Inside this fertile crescent were tablelands and deserts where half-starved, nomadic tribes traveled, looking for pastures for their sheep and donkeys.

## The Three Sayings of God

In the first chapter of Genesis, *God said*, and we have Creation.

Again in chapter 9, *God said*, and it is to give blessing to all humanity.

In chapter 12, *God said* a third time, and it is the beginning of God's people.

These are very uneven steps in the Bible since the revelation made to God's people fills the rest of the Sacred Scriptures. What we read from here on concerns all humanity, but it will be what God has said and done in his own people.

If we enter deeply into the spirit of the Bible, we will discover that these three facets of the divine work – creation, blessing to humanity and God's people – form a whole and they are interrelated in thousands of ways. But let us beware! If we have not really understood the meaning of these three steps which come from the mouth of God, there will come a time when we will no longer be able to accept the testimony of the Bible; and even the meaning of Jesus will be lost for us. Because these three “words” are contrary to some preconceptions which deeply mark our time.

In the first “God said” this word created the universe with its natural laws. The Bible recalls that these laws are permanent. It will also add that the universe is always at God's service and that it obeys God's word. To say that God put the world on automatic pilot is mostly true: God does not constantly pull strings. However, we would be a long way from biblical revelation if we said that God fixed everything at the beginning and did not allow to have other forces interfere with these laws or make them incidental (from our point of view). On the seventh day, God is said to have rested from the work done (Gen 2:4), but the opposite is also true: “the Father goes on working (Jn 5:17).” God is always expressing Self through works, and creation continues to live and exist in God. Nature's laws are the shadow of a superior justice that is in God, but in nature, starting with its richness and its splendor, we find much more than just physical laws. Its ongoing creativity, one of its most mysterious capacities, is a reflection of God's creative freedom which is never shackled.

This is enough to startle all those who theorize about absolute truth, such as the following: *laws are inflexible and nothing exists outside of what is measurable*. There would be no scientific research without such theories, but that does not mean they present the whole reality of the world, or even what is essential. Yet, it is this preconception which prevents many Christians from admitting any intervention whatsoever by God in the natural order of the world. In the Gospels, they will reject first the multiplication of the loaves, Mary's virginity, the Transfiguration... or they will make the texts mean the opposite of what they actually say. They will reject all the actual testimonies of those who have experienced similar interventions by God. Going further they will reject any direct intervention by God in our inner world, and very logically, they will deny that prayer makes sense. This rationalism will give rise to many books and discussions, but in the end, it is fruitless. It will not arouse faith and it never brings joy.

The second “God said” in Noah's story is equally filled with meaning. God inaugurates the postflood days by making a pact with all the nations and religions, since all are Noah's children. If God blesses them, it means that God is offering them a path to salvation: they will find God through their many cultures and religions (Acts 17:27).

In their search for wisdom in the words of their sacred books, when God's Word or Wisdom becomes present, it merely continues its creative work: through this God arranged the stages of creation (Heb 1:2). Therefore, the whole course of history will continue the plan of God the Creator; and for their part, religions will always be connected with a discovery of God or of "the divine" in nature (Rom 1:20; Acts 17:27).

What more do we need? Doesn't humanity have all it needs to complete creation and to reach its goal? That would mean forgetting that "Noah's children are still Adam's children." Worldwide conflicts may turn us back quickly from our dreams into a reality which is not very pretty. But let us not dwell on the failures and limitations of human wisdom, because what matters is found elsewhere.

Creation was God's way of expressing the Godself. Even if God could bestow the richness of the universe on a humanity having become somewhat rational, nothing of what is more extraordinary in God would appear – the dynamism and the excesses of a love whose initiatives God alone can fathom. And God could not go beyond all the forms of benevolence that we commonly call Providence without breaking the circle of a seemingly perfect happy world. Such a relationship between God and God's creation would still be alien to the holiness of God. And so, God calls individuals and groups to share in this unique history. They would embark on new and untrodden paths which often run counter to common experience. The call of Abraham was the first branching off, the first break.

This third "God said" marks the start of God's people, different from all other peoples; and this contrast, or simply the duality between those who are chosen and those who are not, causes a great deal of uneasiness in many Christians' consciences (see note p. 596). Why this double-standard? Are we sure that biblical revelation is more than just another religion among others? We may be tempted to renounce our richness out of false humility: why would I have the truth more than others? At this point again, an act of faith is required of us. Now is the time to accept or reject the God of the Bible, the God who is "predilection and fidelity." God calls whom she wants and gives to one person what she does not give to another. God gives more so that we produce more and so that everyone may benefit from it, but God gives definitely what she wants. Often, without admitting it, we consider God as an unjust boss facing all the workers, and not treating them all in the same way. This has nothing to do with reality. Workers did not wait for the boss to exist. It is the opposite with God: we are not ready-made before God, waiting for what God will give us. Instead, God made us all different and out of nothing. And at the same time as God makes us what we are, our Creator places us on a path merging with our needs, our hopes and our longing for happiness.

From the outset, Christians must accept the unique aspect of their vocation: it is both their treasure and their service to the world. It would make no sense for them to go back to the ranks of non-believers since others are not after their places. Fear alone can cause such panic: the fear of being different, or perhaps another fear which is a lack of faith: are not God's great promises an illusion?

SECOND PART OF GENESIS  
THE ANCESTORS OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

**The call of Abram**

Wis 10:5  
Acts 7:2  
Sir 44:19  
Jn 8:56  
Heb 11:8  
Is 51:2  
Jer 4:2  
Gal 3:8  
Num 24:9  
Acts 3:25

**12** • <sup>1</sup>Yahweh said to Abram, “Leave your country, your family and your father’s house, for the land I will show you. <sup>2</sup>I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup>I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse, and in you all peoples of the earth will be blessed.”

<sup>4</sup>So Abram went as Yahweh had told him, and Lot went with him.

*Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. <sup>5</sup>Abram took Sarai, his wife, his nephew Lot, all the posses-*

*sions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran. They set out for the land of Canaan.*

They arrived at Canaan. <sup>6</sup>Abram traveled through the country as far as Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. <sup>7</sup>Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” There he built an altar to Yahweh who had appeared to him.

<sup>8</sup>From there he went on to the mountains east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel to the west and Ai to the east. There also he built an altar to Yahweh and called on the name of

13:15  
15:18  
17:8  
Dt  
1:8  
Mt  
5:5

22:14  
28:18

• **12.1** Abram was already old. Around him many groups journeyed South, toward Canaan, in search of better lands. Why should he follow them? His life would be over soon (4) and, he had no children. Could he start his life over again?

God was calling him: “Leave; there is something awaiting you!” And Abraham left. In our own day, economic necessity forces so many immigrants to leave their country without knowing where to go or how their lives will be affected.

*Leave... for the land I will show you.* Abraham only knew that God wanted to give him what he had longed for during his entire life and he welcomed this promise. In spite of his age, he was still able to hope for the impossible and this heartfelt readiness, or this ability for rebirth, was more pleasing to God than any good works.

*Leave your country, your family and your father’s house.* Here we have one of God’s first words in Sacred Scripture. This call to Abraham is still part of legend, like the chapters of Genesis that precede, yet it is also the beginning of a true history which will go on for centuries and which is far from being over: the history of Israel and of the Christian people. We rightly call Abraham the father of believers since the call that he received and his leaving for unknown lands is precisely what happens to us when we begin to believe.

**FAITH**

*Leave your country, your family and your father’s house.* To many of us God is more likely to say: “Let go of your own wisdom.” Because if God is speaking to us, it is not to tell us what we already know. God is testing us, he knocks on our hearts to see what the echo will be: will we be able to let go of our own wisdom and enter into his plan? We thought we knew our own

worth and where we are to go but – what if God already had plans for us; what if God already knew us better than we know ourselves?

It was not Abraham’s initiative to leave. God called him and by doing that, God liberated him. On account of sin, every person is born and lives as if he or she were in a foreign land. Our own reality is hidden from us as long as we are not rooted in God and in communion with him. Our religions and ideologies, products of our culture, do not permit us to go beyond the limits of a world we make to suit ourselves. To become aware of our vocation we need God’s call and we need to be willing to get out of this vicious circle.

Faith will never occur without separation which is why God foresaw it in each one’s life: leaving our parents’ house, beginning to work, getting married... Faith prepares us to face even more painful separations that will place us entirely at the service of God. As believers, we can never think that we have arrived. Until the end of our lives, we are pilgrims, drawn by an ideal never quite reached and always attentive to God’s signs to see where God is waiting for us.

Abraham rightly responded to the call of God who made beautiful promises to him: therein lies all of faith and chapter 15 of Genesis will again express the same thing. In the Bible, we find founders and religious reformers like Moses. We find the wise and wisdom books. Yet, they are all women and men able to respond when God calls them. The promises that God made to Abraham are equally valid for all believers: thanks to them God’s salvation becomes a reality for the world. This is what the Bible says: in you all peoples of the earth will be blessed.

In a divided world in which everyone defends their own turf, God has chosen a man who does not have his own land in order to begin the Kingdom in which he will gather all people.

Yahweh. <sup>9</sup>Then Abram set out in the direction of Negeb.

<sup>42:1</sup> • <sup>10</sup>There was famine in the land, and Abram went down to Egypt to stay there for some time, for the famine was severe in the land.

<sup>11</sup>Just as he was about to enter Egypt he said to Sarai, his wife, “Now I know you are a beautiful woman.

<sup>20</sup><sup>26:1</sup><sup>Ps</sup><sup>105:</sup><sup>14</sup> <sup>12</sup>When the Egyptians see you they will say: ‘That is his wife!’ They will then kill me, but they will let you live. <sup>13</sup>Say that you are my sister, so that they treat me well on account of you and my life be spared because of you.”

<sup>14</sup>In fact, when Abram arrived in Egypt, the Egyptians saw that the woman was very beautiful.

<sup>15</sup>Pharaoh’s officials saw her and praised her to Pharaoh. The woman was taken into Pharaoh’s house <sup>16</sup>and because of her he dealt well with Abram; he received sheep, cattle, donkeys, menservants, maidservants, she-asses and camels.

<sup>17</sup>But Yahweh inflicted severe plagues on Pharaoh and his household because of Sarai. <sup>18</sup>So Pharaoh sum-

moned Abram and said, “What have you done to me? <sup>19</sup>Why did you say: ‘She’s my sister,’ so that I took her for my wife. Now, here is your wife! Take her and go!” <sup>20</sup>And Pharaoh gave orders to his men regarding Abram, and they sent him on his way, with his wife and all that was his.

**13** <sup>1</sup>Abram went up from Egypt to the Negeb, he and his wife, with all he had and Lot with him. <sup>2</sup>Now Abram was very rich in flocks, silver and gold. <sup>3</sup>As he journeyed on, he went from the Negeb as far as Bethel, to the place where he first pitched his tent between Bethel and Ai <sup>4</sup>at the spot where he had formerly made an altar and called on the Name of Yahweh.

<sup>24:35</sup>  
<sup>Job</sup>  
<sup>1:3</sup>  
<sup>Ps</sup>  
<sup>112:</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>

**Abram and Lot separate**

• <sup>5</sup>*Lot who went with Abram also had flocks, cattle and tents.* <sup>6</sup>*The land was not sufficient to allow them to stay together, for their possessions were too great for them to live together.*

<sup>7</sup>A quarrel arose between the herdsmen of Abram’s flock and those of Lot. (The Canaanites and the Perizzites were living in the land at the time.)

<sup>8</sup>Abram said to Lot, “Don’t let there be a dispute between you and me, nor

<sup>36:7</sup>

<sup>26:20</sup>

From then, God chooses the poor and those whose lives are not secure, in order to save the world. To them, as to Abraham, God promises the final City (Heb 11:8).

*Abraham’s children:* see Mt 3:7; Jn 8:33; Acts 3:25; 13:26; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:8.

*Abram and Abraham:* Gen 17:5.

• 10. *Say that you are my sister, so that they treat me well on account of you.* Some people are shocked at the low level of morality in those times, and in Abraham himself. When God called Abraham to make him his friend, he did not change him all at once. This moral change in his chosen people was to be accomplished over centuries: God is patient. Everything in its own time: we would do well to ponder this, since we tend to judge quickly and prematurely.

It is not by chance that this incident is related here: stories tell us important things. God has promised Abraham land. He knows neither where or how it will be given: God never gave much explanation. His first idea is to go and see in the direction of Egypt a rich land with its irrigated valley in contrast with the arid hills of Palestine. There he even surrenders his wife to Pharaoh in order to save his life. Giving his wife is like making an alliance with Pharaoh, with

Egypt – and the Israelites will later learn to their detriment that things do not prosper when instead of counting on the Covenant with God, they lean on Egypt. Sarah, moreover, is his true wife, the “free woman” who in God’s plan will give birth to Abraham’s heir. Abraham nearly lost everything. God’s blessing will not reach Abraham in the land of the rich: for his descendants Egypt will be nothing more than the land of slavery.

• **13.5** A quarrel occurs between Abraham’s servants and those of Lot. Abraham values peace above his own interests so he allows Lot to choose his land.

*If you go to the left, I will go to the right.* Abraham already has the insight of faith. He still does not know that the land he is going to select is only an image of the mysterious land which is the kingdom of God within us. Yet, instead of being the one to choose, he allows Lot to have the first option. He acts out of love without realizing it. Without trying, he discovered the true land, the human heart, which is where the kingdom of God is realized. On the surface Lot chooses the better part, but in fact he loses it.

*All the land you see I will give to you and*

between my herdsmen and yours, since we are brothers! <sup>9</sup>Isn't the whole land there before you? Let us part company. If you go to the left, I will go to the right; if you go to the right, I will go to the left."

<sup>2:9</sup><sup>19:24</sup> <sup>10</sup>Lot looked up and saw the whole valley of the Jordan: how well it was watered! Before Yahweh destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, this was like one of Yahweh's gardens, like the country of Egypt, on coming to Zoar. <sup>11</sup>Lot chose for himself all the Jordan valley and journeyed eastward. In this way they separated from each other. <sup>12</sup>Abram settled in the country of Canaan while Lot lived among the towns of the plain *and moved his tent as far as Sodom*. <sup>13</sup>Now the people of Sodom were wicked, sinning greatly against Yahweh.

<sup>14</sup>Yahweh said to Abram after Lot had left him, "Raise your eyes and look from where you are, towards the north, the south, the east and the west; <sup>15</sup>all the land you see I will give to you and your descendants forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; if the grains of the dust can be counted, then your descendants may be counted. <sup>17</sup>Come, travel through the length and breadth of the land, for it is to you that I am giving it."

<sup>18</sup>So Abram moved his tent and came to live by the oak of Mamre at Hebron. There he built an altar to Yahweh.

**14** <sup>1</sup>At the time of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of

Goiim, <sup>2</sup>these kings made war on Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). <sup>3</sup>All these joined forces in the valley of Siddim (that is the Salt Sea). <sup>4</sup>Twelve years they had been dominated by Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. <sup>5</sup>In the fourteenth year, Chedorlaomer and the king who were his allies, came and fought and subdued the Rephaim in Ashteroth-karnaim, the Zuzim in Ham, the Emin in Shaveh-kiriathaim <sup>6</sup>and the Horites in their Mount Seir as far as Elparan which is near the desert.

<sup>7</sup>They then turned back and came to the Spring of Judgment (that is, Kadesh) and subdued all the country of the Amalekites, as well as that of the Amorites who lived in Hazazontamar. <sup>8</sup>Then the king of Sodom, the king of Gomorrah, the king of Admah, the king of Zeboiim and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar) went out and took up battle positions in the valley of Siddim <sup>9</sup>against Chedorlaomer king of Elam, Tidal king of Goiim, Amraphel king of Shinar and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings against five.

<sup>10</sup>Now there were many bitumen pits in the valley of Siddim, and as the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, some fell into them and the rest took refuge in the mountains. <sup>11</sup>The enemy took all the possessions of Sodom and Gomorrah, all their provisions and went off. <sup>12</sup>They also took Lot, the son of Abram's brother, who lived in Sodom, and his possessions and went off.

<sup>13</sup>One who escaped came to tell Abram the Hebrew, who was living by the oak of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eshcol and of Aner: these were allies of Abram.

#### Abraham and Melchizedek

• <sup>14</sup>As soon as Abram heard that his brother had been taken away captive, he assembled and led forth his trained men born in his house, three hundred and eighteen men and set off in pursuit as far as Dan. <sup>15</sup>He grouped his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and routed and followed them to

*your descendants forever*. This is the land of Canaan, today's Palestine. Abraham, however, will not yet own it himself: God only promises him that the land will be his. At the time it is still occupied by the Canaanites.

It would be worthwhile to see why, for centuries, God formed people with the promise of a land they would have to conquer. It is because people cannot discover their dignity as children of God if they are not given specific hopes such as land and a home. The human personality

cannot develop unless a person has something to care for and to defend, something to fight for.

• **14.14** What is the origin of the legend in this chapter, a legend which was inserted much later into the history of Abraham? Did it come from the desire to add to Abraham's glory by attributing a military feat to him?

In any case, God, the author of the Bible, wanted this apparently unimportant story to convey two things:

Hobah, north of Damascus. <sup>16</sup>Then he brought back all his possessions, his kinsman Lot and his possessions, together with the women and the people.

<sup>17</sup>On his return after defeating Chedorlaomer and the kings who were his allies, the king of Sodom came out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is the Valley of the King).

<sup>18</sup>Then Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup>and he blessed Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth!" <sup>20</sup>And blessed be God Most High who has delivered your enemies into your hands!"

And Abram gave him a tenth part of everything.

<sup>21</sup>The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the people and keep the goods for yourself." <sup>22</sup>Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I raise my hand to Yahweh God Most High, creator of heaven and earth, to swear <sup>23</sup>that not one thread or thong of a sandal, or anything that is yours, would I take.

*Melchizedek was a priest of God Most High. He had not received the word of God, as Abraham had; yet, in his own way he knew the one who had called Abraham and he also recognized Abraham. Those whom God calls are never isolated because they always meet other friends of God. Abraham paid the tenth part, but went away richer with the joy of having heard from the lips of this stranger words which confirmed God's blessing on him (see Lk 1:39).*

*I will take nothing of what is yours. Abraham will take nothing from the inhabitants of Canaan, but only the blessing that Melchizedek gives him, who is, according to the story, King of Salem the future Jerusalem, the holy city.*

*Melchizedek brought bread and wine. What a strange person Melchizedek is! In Israel, kings were not priests nor did they offer bread and wine in their sacrifices. But Psalm 110 and then the letter to the Hebrews (5:6 and chapter 7) see Melchizedek as a figure of Christ, the only Priest. Abraham, despite his greatness, only prepared for the coming of the one who would obtain the blessing promised by God for all nations. Here Christ is foretold in a veiled form as the priest and king who consecrates the bread and the wine.*

Lest you say, 'Abram became rich at my expense,' <sup>24</sup>I claim nothing for myself! Only what the young men have eaten and the share that is due to Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, the men who came with me."

**God's covenant with Abram**

**15** <sup>1</sup>After this the word of Yahweh was spoken to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward will be very great!"

<sup>2</sup>Abram said, "My Lord Yahweh, where are your promises? I am still childless and all I have will go to Eliezer of Damascus. <sup>3</sup>You have given me no children, so a slave of mine will be my heir."

<sup>4</sup>Then the word of Yahweh was spoken to him again, "Eliezer will not be your heir, but a child born of you (your own flesh and blood) will be your heir."

<sup>5</sup>Then Yahweh brought him outside and said to him, "Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can. Your descendants will be like that."

<sup>6</sup>Abram believed Yahweh who, because of this, held him to be an upright

• **15.1** *My Lord Yahweh, I am still childless. At a certain age, we begin to worry about what will remain of our life: our marriage, our children, our years of work. At that precise moment, Abraham proves his faith by believing in promises which are seemingly unattainable. Abraham's Covenant with God is the beginning of a reciprocal friendship.*

*Because of this Yahweh held him to be an upright man. "Not because you are a very good person or because you have helped your neighbor, or because you have served me for many years... but because I told you: 'Do not be afraid' and you have placed all your concerns in my hands."*

*On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram (v.18). Throughout the Bible much is written about the Covenant. What is the meaning of God making a covenant with humans?*

*God loves all women and men, and wants to save all even when they do not know him. But he also wants to bring the human race to maturity. For this to come about, at least a minority of people in the world must have encountered God in a personal way, since this meeting is the beginning of the most valuable experiences.*

*This is how, throughout history, God calls those whom he has chosen according to his plan*

Ps  
110:  
4  
Lk  
22:19  
Heb  
7:1  
28:22

Dt  
33:29  
Ps  
28:7

Dt  
1:10  
Heb  
11:12  
1Mac  
2:52  
Rom  
4:3  
Gal  
3:6  
Jas  
2:23



man. <sup>7</sup>And he said, "I am Yahweh who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land as your possession."

<sup>8</sup>Then Abram asked, "My Lord, how am I to know that it shall be mine?"

<sup>9</sup>Yahweh replied, "Bring me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtle dove and a young pigeon." <sup>10</sup>Abram brought all these animals, cut them in two, and laid each half facing its other half, but he did not cut the birds in half. <sup>11</sup>The birds of prey came down upon them, but Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup>As the sun was going down, a deep sleep came over Abram, and a dreadful darkness took hold of him. <sup>13</sup>Then Yahweh said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be exiles in a land that is not theirs. They will be slaves there, oppressed for four hundred years. <sup>14</sup>But I will judge the nation that oppresses them, and after that, they will not leave empty-handed. <sup>15</sup>As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace, and be buried at a ripe old age. <sup>16</sup>Your descendants of the fourth

generation will come back here, for the wickedness of the Amorites has not yet deserved that I take the land from them."

<sup>17</sup>When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, a smoking firepot and a flaming torch passed between the halves of the victims. <sup>18</sup>On that day Yahweh made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this country from the river of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates.

<sup>19</sup>The land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, <sup>20</sup>the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, <sup>21</sup>the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites."

Ex  
3:8  
Dt  
7:1

### The birth of Ishmael

**16** • <sup>1</sup>Sarai, Abram's wife had not borne him a child, but she had an Egyptian servant named Hagar, <sup>2</sup>and she said to Abram, "Now, since Yahweh has kept me from having children, go to my servant; perhaps I shall have a child by her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

Gal  
4:21

<sup>3</sup>Abram had been in the land of Ca-

and eternal selection. In making a pact or a *covenant* with them, he gives them the opportunity to enter into a life of faithfulness. They will know God as a living person and will deal with him as such.

Therefore in beginning his work of salvation in human history, God wants at least one person to share his secret and to know the depth of his designs: *Abram believed Yahweh.*

Through such faith, God's eternal decree lodges in the heart and mind of one believer and this is worth more than many good works. From that moment a mysterious complicity will unite Abraham and God forever: this is the Covenant.

God makes a covenant with Abraham according to the customs of that time. When signing a pact, both parties pass between the two halves of a sacrificed animal (see Jer 34:18). Abraham follows this ritual and then there passes a fire which represents God. It is God who commits himself and who makes the promise.

*Faith makes us friends of God:* Hab 2:4; Rom 4:2; Gal 3:6; Heb 11:11.

• **16.1** Abraham is concerned that God's promise is not being fulfilled. This son whom God has promised to the old man, could he not

perhaps have it with Hagar, his other wife? For the child to be considered a son of Sarai, would it not be enough for her to adopt him according to the customs of those days? God remains silent and lets Abraham solve these problems in the way his still primitive conscience tells him.

But Abraham's plan fails: the heir that God promised him will not be a son conceived and born "according to the flesh," that is, by human means, but the son of a miracle. In this we see the freedom of God who prefers to fulfill his promises at the very time when they appear most impossible to achieve.

### VISIONS AND ANGELS

What are we to think of these appearances of angels? Did they really happen or are these passages merely a way of speaking? Let us clarify the following:

– We must not confuse *angels* and the *Angel of Yahweh*. Only in the last books of the Old Testament (and naturally in the New Testament) are *angels* mentioned with the meaning that we give them: spiritual creatures who have their place in the ordering of the world and in the salvation of humans as for example in Zec 1 and 2 and also in Dn 9:21 and 10:12-21. Ancient Israelites did, however, sometimes speak of the

naan ten years when Sarai, his wife, took Hagar, her Egyptian maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as wife. <sup>4</sup>He went in to Hagar and she became pregnant.

When she was aware of this, she began to despise her mistress. <sup>5</sup>Sarai said to Abram, "May this injury done to me be yours. I put my servant in your arms and now that she knows she is pregnant, I count for nothing in her eyes. Let Yahweh judge between me and you." <sup>6</sup>Abram said to Sarai, "Your servant is in your power; do with her as you please." Then Sarai treated her so badly that she ran away.

<sup>Ex 15:22</sup> • <sup>7</sup>The angel of Yahweh found her near a spring in the wilderness <sup>8</sup> and said to her, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I'm running away from Sarai, my mistress." <sup>9</sup>The <sup>1P 2:18</sup> angel of Yahweh said to her, "Go back to your mistress and humbly submit yourself to her." <sup>10</sup>The angel of Yahweh

said to her, "I will so increase your descendants, that they will be too numerous to be counted." <sup>11</sup>Then the angel of Yahweh said to her, "Now you are with child and you will have a son, and you shall name him Ishmael, for Yahweh has heard your distress. <sup>12</sup>He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against everyone and everyone's hand against him, defiant towards all his brothers."

<sup>13</sup>Hagar gave to Yahweh who spoke to her the name of *El Roi*, for she said: "I have seen the One who sees me." <sup>14</sup>That is why this well is called the well of *Lahai-roi*. It is between Kadesh and Bered.

<sup>15</sup>Hagar gave birth to a son and Abram called the child Hagar bore him, Ishmael. <sup>16</sup>Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar gave birth to Ishmael.

**Abram becomes Abraham**

**17** • <sup>1</sup>When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty.

Angel of Yahweh or a Messenger of Yahweh to express things which they could not explain but which indicated an intervention by God.

When an epidemic providentially destroyed the Assyrian army, it was attributed to *the Angel of Yahweh*: see Isaiah 37:36 and also 2 Samuel 24:16. Since they knew that no one could see God, when someone had a vision, they spoke of the Angel of Yahweh: see Judges 6:11.

– The whole Bible shows that God reveals himself in many different ways to those who seek him. He speaks through events; he enlightens the hearts of those who read his Word; he speaks through our intuition and our dreams; he speaks through visions or words, and sometimes, as in the case of the prophets, in a more direct manner, in an intimate and spiritual way.

– We cannot, however, take literally all that is said about visions or words received from God because ancient people did not express themselves the way we do. When a person was reflecting or was tempted by evil, they sometimes expressed this inner meditation as a dialogue with different characters and would say that the devil or God dialogued with this person: see Joshua 7:10 and 1 Kings 3:4.

– It is quite possible that God did not act with ancient biblical people in the same way that he acts in our days. Now, after the coming of Christ, we have everything in him and in his church and we have no need of visions and appearances. God usually reserves them for those he leads on

a special path. However, in the first centuries of biblical times, God revealed himself much more through those more visible but inferior ways.

• **7. Go back to your mistress.** This is a word of the Lord for so many people who suffer injustice, for girls who, in a liberal, class-conscious society, must accept humiliating tasks in order not to die of hunger with their parents; for the young people who, after a university education, realize that, except for a select few, modern society needs only sweepers and laborers.

*Humbly submit yourself to her*, not because her tyranny is just but because you, too, need to be freed from your arrogance. You are right in thinking that you are worth more than what society offers you, but if, through circumstances, the Lord humiliates you, trust in him and think that this humiliation prepares you for a greater mission than the one you were thinking about. If you remain conscious that God calls you to be a free person and one who frees others, he will give you the opportunity to do it.

*Lahai-roi* could be translated as *the one who lives and sees*. Of course, it is a popular etymology, but the text uses it to underline an important experience of Hagar: to have seen that God lives and sees us is enough to give us wings.

• **17.1 Abram** means venerated father, and *Abraham*: father of a multitude. In changing the name of his servant, God enables him to begin a

Lk 1:3

28:3  
35:11  
Ex 6:3

Walk in my presence and be without blame! <sup>2</sup>I will make a covenant between myself and you, and I will multiply your race.” <sup>3</sup>Abram fell face down and God said to him, <sup>4</sup>“This is my covenant with you: you will be the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>5</sup>No longer will you be called Abram, but Abraham, because I will make you the father of a multitude of nations. <sup>6</sup>I will make you more and more famous; I will multiply your descendants; nations shall spring from you, kings shall be among your descendants. <sup>7</sup>And I will establish a covenant, an everlasting covenant between myself and you and your descendants after you; from now on I will be your God and the God of your descendants after you, for generations to come. <sup>8</sup>I will give to you and your descendants after you the land you are living in, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession and I will be the God of your race.”

Rom  
4:17  
Ne  
9:7

12:7  
48:4

### The circumcision

• <sup>9</sup>God said to Abraham, “For your part, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. <sup>10</sup>This is my covenant with you, that you will keep, you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised; <sup>11</sup>you shall circumcise your foreskin and that will be the sign of

Ex  
12:48  
Rom  
4:11

the covenant between me and you. <sup>12</sup>When he is eight days old, every male among you will be circumcised, generation after generation; <sup>13</sup>those born in your household or bought from a foreigner to be slaves. Whether born in your household or bought to be slaves, they must be circumcised. So my covenant will be written in your flesh as an everlasting covenant. <sup>14</sup>Any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people for having broken my covenant.”

Col  
2:11  
Lev  
12:3  
Lk  
2:21

Ezk  
37:26  
Rom  
9:4  
11:29

Dt  
10:16  
Jer  
4:4

<sup>15</sup>God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai, your wife, no longer are you to call her Sarai, but Sarah. <sup>16</sup>I will bless her, and I will give you a son by her. I will bless her and from her will come nations; kings and peoples shall come from her.”

<sup>17</sup>Then Abraham fell face down, and he laughed and said to himself, “Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? And can Sarah who is ninety have a child?” <sup>18</sup>And Abraham said to God, “If only you would accept Ishmael as yours!” <sup>19</sup>But God said, “Not at all! It is Sarah, your wife, who will give birth to your son and you will name him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him and his descendants after him forever. <sup>20</sup>As for Ishmael, I heard you. I will bless him and make him fruitful, and I will multiply his race. He shall be the father of twelve princes and I will make of him a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant I will establish with Isaac, the child Sarah will have this time next year.” <sup>22</sup>When he had finished speaking with Abraham, God went away from him.

18:12  
21:6  
Jn  
8:56

25:12

<sup>23</sup>Abraham then took Ishmael, his son, as

new life and to really become what his new name expresses. Jesus will proceed in the same way with the first leader of his church (John 1:42).

• 9. *Circumcision*, cutting of the skin called “foreskin” of the male organ, was an ancient custom of Oriental people. It was one of those “initiation rites” which, among some people, mark the passage of an adolescent into adult society. Circumcision was a religious rite intended to ensure fertility.

Circumcision took on a new meaning for Israel: it was considered the distinct sign of their belonging to the chosen people. A foreigner could enter the religious community of Israel only by being circumcised.

*My covenant will be written in your flesh.* A married woman wears the ring her husband puts on her finger. Something similar happens to people who enter into a community: they need

a symbol of their membership in the community. Similarly, every male descendant of Abraham must have an indelible sign of his belonging to the chosen race; this sign is circumcision.

Yet, the prophets teach that the circumcision of the flesh is worth nothing without the circumcision “of the heart,” which means getting rid of one’s vices. The external rite is worthless if one does not live what the sign expresses. See Jer 9:24; Dt 10:16; Gal 5:4; Phil 3:3; Rom 2:25.

For Christians “being circumcised or not” is irrelevant: Acts 11:3-15; 1 Cor 7:18; Gal 6:15. This particular obligation, as well as obligations regarding the Sabbath, abstention from pork, the temple sacrifices and rituals were only valid until the coming of Christ and only for the Jewish people: Col 2:11 and 2:16-22.

Why do so many people who are indifferent about their faith baptize their children? Why do they come to receive ashes?

well as all those born in his house and all those he had bought to be slaves, all the males in the household of Abraham, and circumcised their foreskins that same day as God had told him. <sup>24</sup> Abraham was ninety-nine years old when he was circumcised, <sup>25</sup> and his son, Ishmael, was thirteen. <sup>26</sup> Abraham and his son Ishmael were both circumcised that same day. <sup>27</sup> And every male in his household, whether born in his household or bought with money from a foreigner, was circumcised with him.

**Yahweh visits Abraham**

**18** • <sup>1</sup> Yahweh appeared to Abraham near the oak of Mamre. Abraham was sitting at the entrance to his tent, in the heat of the day, <sup>2</sup> when he looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them he ran from the entrance of the tent to meet them. He bowed to the ground <sup>3</sup> and said, “My Lord, if I have found favor in your sight, do not pass your servant by. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought. Wash your feet and then rest under the trees. <sup>5</sup> I shall fetch some bread so that you can be refreshed and continue on your way, since you have come to your servant.” They then said, “Do as you say.” <sup>6</sup> Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said to her, “Quick, take three measures of flour, knead it and make cakes.”

<sup>7</sup> Abraham then ran to the herd, took a fine, tender calf, gave it to the servant

Heb 13:2

who hurried to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> He took butter and milk and together with the calf he had prepared laid it all before them. And while he remained standing, they ate. <sup>9</sup> They then asked, “Where is Sarah, your wife?” Abraham answered, “She is in the tent.” <sup>10</sup> And the visitor said, “At this same time next year I will return and Sarah by then will have a son.”

15:4

Now Sarah was behind him, listening at the entrance to the tent. <sup>11</sup> Abraham and Sarah were old, well on in years, and Sarah no longer had her monthly periods. <sup>12</sup> Sarah laughed to herself saying, “Now that I am old and worn and my husband is an old man, am I to have this pleasure?” <sup>13</sup> Yahweh said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying: ‘Am I really going to have a child now that I am old?’ <sup>14</sup> Is there anything that is impossible for God? At this same time next year I will return and Sarah by then will have a son.”

17:17  
Rom 9:9

<sup>15</sup> Sarah denied saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. But he said, “You did laugh.”

Jer 32:17  
Mt 19:26  
Lk 1:36  
Heb 11:11

**Abraham intercedes for Sodom**

• <sup>16</sup> The men went away and turned towards Sodom. Abraham walked with them to set them on their way. <sup>17</sup> And Yahweh said, “Can I conceal from

Ex 32:11  
Am 7:1  
Jer 15:1  
Is 53:12  
Jn 17:20  
Jas 5:16

• **18.1** God’s promises were meant for the descendants of Abraham; he, himself would never see their fulfillment. But God gave his friend a proof of what he was going to accomplish: Isaac was born in miraculous circumstances. It was logical to fear that Abraham’s descendants would feel superior to other people and would think they were saved simply by belonging to his race (Lk 3:8). Indeed God acknowledged as heirs of Abraham only the direct descendants of Isaac: the son of a miracle, Sarah’s son and not the sons born of slave women. In this we are taught that no one has any claim on God simply because of being born into a particular family. God’s promises will be fulfilled for us to the extent that we imitate Abraham in his faith (Gal 4:21-31; Rom 4:13-17).

We marvel at this simple story: God, showing human traits, comes to ask for his friend’s hospitality before he showers him with his favors. Commentators will not dare say whether it happened that way or it was merely a way of

speaking, but the believer knows that this is the way God acts.

God does not appear alone but with two angels as if to dispel the image of a solitary God, common among those who still do not know about the mystery of the Three Divine Persons.

*Why did Sarah laugh?* Sarah’s laughing is another one of those popular explanations which the Bible supplies about names of places and of people; her son will be called Isaac, a name which sounds like “laughed” in Hebrew.

*Is there anything impossible for God?* See Lk 1:37; 18:27; Mk 11:22.

• **16.** *Can I conceal from Abraham what I am about to do?* When God makes us his friends he gives us responsibility for the world. Just as with friendship between people, friendship with God means sharing everything. God teaches us to think as he does and to act with him and he invites us to make requests.

We should not think that if we persist in

Abraham what I am about to do?  
Am 3:7 <sup>18</sup> Abraham, in fact, is going to become  
Jn 15:15 a great and powerful nation and  
 through him all the nations of the earth  
 will be blessed, <sup>19</sup> for I have chosen him  
 to command his sons and his house-  
 hold after him to keep the way of the  
 Lord by doing what is right and just, so  
 that Yahweh may bring about for Abra-  
 ham what he has promised him.”

<sup>20</sup> Then Yahweh said, “How great is  
 the cry for justice against Sodom and  
 Gomorrah! And how grievous is their  
 sin! <sup>21</sup> I am going down to see if they  
 have done all that they are charged  
 with in the outcry that has reached me.  
 If it is not so, I will know.”

Ps 106:23 <sup>22</sup> The men with him turned away  
Ezk 22:30 and went towards Sodom, but Yahweh  
 remained standing before Abraham.

<sup>23</sup> Abraham went forward and said,  
 “Will you really let the just perish with  
 the wicked? <sup>24</sup> Perhaps there are fifty  
Num 16:22 good people in the town. Are you really  
 going to let them perish? Would you not  
 spare the place for the sake of these  
 fifty righteous people? <sup>25</sup> It would not be  
 at all like you to do such a thing and  
 you can’t let the good perish with the  
 wicked, nor treat the good and the  
 wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will  
 not the judge of all the earth be just?”

<sup>26</sup> Yahweh said, “If I find fifty good peo-  
 ple in Sodom, I will spare the whole  
 place for their sake.”

<sup>27</sup> Abraham spoke up again, “I know

that I am very bold to speak like this to  
 my Lord, I who am only dust and ashes!  
<sup>28</sup> But perhaps the number of the good  
 is five less than fifty. Will you destroy  
 the town because of five?” Yahweh re-  
 plied, “I will not destroy the town if I find  
 forty-five good people there.” <sup>29</sup> Again  
 Abraham said to him, “Perhaps there  
 will be only forty.” He answered, “For  
 the sake of forty I will not do it.” <sup>30</sup> Abra-  
 ham went on, saying, “May my Lord  
 not be angry, but let me speak. Maybe  
 only thirty good people will be found in  
 the town.” Yahweh answered, “I will not  
 destroy it if I find thirty there.” <sup>31</sup> Abra-  
 ham said, “Now that I have been so  
 bold as to speak to my Lord, what if  
 only twenty can be found?” He said,  
 “For the sake of twenty I will not de-  
 stroy the place.”

<sup>32</sup> But Abraham insisted, “May my  
 Lord not be angry, but let me speak just  
 once more. What if only ten can be  
 found?” And Yahweh answered, “For  
 the sake of ten good people, I will not  
 destroy Sodom.” <sup>33</sup> When Yahweh had  
 finished speaking with Abraham, he left  
 and Abraham went home.

### The destruction of Sodom

**19** • <sup>1</sup> When the two angels reached  
 Sodom in the evening, Lot was  
 sitting at the gate of the town. As soon  
 as he saw them, he rose to meet them,  
 bowed with his face to the ground, <sup>2</sup> and  
 said, “My lords, I pray you come to your

prayer, we will get whatever we ask for. If what  
 we ask for is not good for us, God will not grant  
 it. But God is pleased when we know how to  
 struggle and to insist in order to obtain what he,  
 himself, wants to give us in his mercy. He does  
 not want to merely impose this but to grant it to  
 those capable of wishing for it in the same way  
 that he does. “I do not wish the wicked’s death,  
 but rather that they turn from their ways and live”  
 (Ezk 33:11).

*I know I am very bold to speak like this to my  
 Lord.* The boldness of Abraham who begins to  
 bargain discreetly and firmly demonstrates his  
 faith. The old man converses with God just as he  
 would with a friend in making a deal. Note how  
 Abraham remains seated while the Lord is stand-  
 ing in front of him. This candid approach may  
 appear as a lack of respect to those who read the

Bible later; thus they changed the phrase:  
 Abraham was standing to speak with Yahweh  
 who was seated. Jesus said that he would wait on  
 his faithful servants as a servant on his masters  
 (Lk 12:37).

• **19.1** The salt of the Red Sea and the ruins  
 of two cities destroyed by earthquakes: Sodom  
 and Gomorrah – perhaps gave food for thought.  
 We must remember that in those days people  
 looked upon catastrophes as punishments from  
 God and upon prosperity as a blessing from  
 God. Such was the origin of this story which  
 teaches us some truths:

- respect for guests who must be welcomed as  
 angels of the Lord;
  - the horror of homosexuality.
- Sodom and Gomorrah will remain tragic

servant's house to stay the night. Wash your feet, and then in the morning you may rise early and go on your way." They said, "No, we will spend the night in the square."<sup>3</sup> But so strongly did he insist that they went with him to his house; there he prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast. This they ate.

<sup>4</sup>They had not yet gone to bed when men from the town surrounded the house; they were the men of Sodom, young and old, the entire population.<sup>5</sup> They called Lot and said to him, "Where are the men who arrived here tonight? Send them out so that we may have sex with them."

<sup>6</sup>Lot went out to meet them, shut the door behind him and said,<sup>7</sup> "I beg you, my brothers, don't do such a wicked thing."<sup>8</sup> I have two daughters who are still virgins; let me bring them out to you; you may do with them as you please, but don't do anything to these men, for they have come to shelter under my roof."<sup>9</sup> But they replied, "Get out of the way! This fellow is a foreigner and he wants to play the judge! Now we will do worse with you than with them." They pressed hard against Lot and drew near in order to break the door.<sup>10</sup> But the men inside the house stretched out their hands to bring Lot inside and then shut the door.<sup>11</sup> As for those at the entrance to the house, they were struck with blindness, from the smallest to the largest, so that they were unable to find the door.

<sup>12</sup>The two men said to Lot, "Who is still here with you? Your sons-in-law? Get them out of the place: your sons, your daughters and all your people in

the town. We are about to destroy this place.<sup>13</sup> The cry for retribution against it is great before Yahweh who has sent us to destroy it."<sup>14</sup> Lot went out and spoke to his sons-in-law, those who were to marry his daughters, saying, "Hurry, leave, for Yahweh is about to destroy the town." But they took what he said as a joke.

<sup>15</sup>At daybreak the Angels urged Lot, saying, "Hurry! Take your wife and two daughters who are here, lest they perish because of the sin of the town."<sup>16</sup> As he hesitated, the men took him by the hand and his wife and two daughters with him, because Yahweh had mercy on him. And they led him outside the town.

<sup>17</sup>When they were outside, the men said to him, "Flee for your life and don't look back and don't stop anywhere in the plain. Flee to the mountain lest you perish."

<sup>18</sup>But Lot replied, "My lords, your servant has found favor with you,<sup>19</sup> and you have shown me great kindness in saving my life. But I cannot flee to the mountains for fear the disaster will overtake me and I die. See, there is a town near enough for me to flee to and it's a small one.<sup>20</sup> Let me flee there: it is *very small* (that is why the town is called Zoar). So I will be safe."<sup>21</sup> And the angel answered, "I grant you this favor as well by not destroying the town you speak of.<sup>22</sup> But flee fast for I can do nothing until you arrive there."

<sup>23</sup>The sun had risen on the earth when Lot reached Zoar.<sup>24</sup> Then Yahweh rained on Sodom and Gomorrah burning sulphur out of the heavens from Yahweh,<sup>25</sup> and he completely destroyed those towns and all the valley and all the inhabitants of the towns and everything that grew there.

**Other legends**

•<sup>26</sup> Lot's wife looked back and she became a pillar of salt.

Jdg  
19:22

Lev  
20:13  
Rom  
1:24

2K  
6:18

Mt  
24:15

Wis  
10:7  
2P  
2:6  
Dt  
29:22  
Lk  
17:29  
Is  
34:9  
Rev  
14:10  
Wis  
10:7

names in sacred history, and serve as proof that we must not make fun of God's judgments nor take them lightly. The prophets will recall this catastrophe when they threaten those who refuse to be converted (see Is 1:9; Ezk 16:49) and so will Jesus (Mt 10:15; Lk 17:29).

The present story does not fail to emphasize – in Lot's case – that God never forgets a single one of his children, even when they are isolated in the midst of wickedness.

Lot's answer (v. 8) seems incredible to us, but it coincides with the ideas of those distant days when women were not considered as human persons. It seemed normal to sacrifice a daughter in order to save a friend. See something similar in Judges 19.

• 26. We should remember that these are legendary traditions of the Israelites through which they attempted to explain the origins of

Lk 17:32 <sup>27</sup> Early next morning Abraham returned to the place where he had stood before Yahweh. <sup>28</sup> He looked towards Sodom and Gomorrah and towards all the land of the valley and he saw smoke rising from the earth like the smoke from a furnace.

<sup>29</sup> *So when God destroyed the towns of the plain he remembered Abraham and made Lot escape from the catastrophe while he destroyed the cities where Lot had lived.*

<sup>30</sup> Lot went up from Zoar and lived in the hills with his two daughters, because he was afraid to live in Zoar. He lived in a cave, he and his two daughters. <sup>31</sup> The elder said to the younger, "Our father is old and there is not a man in the country to lie with us as is the custom all over the world. <sup>32</sup> Come, let us make our father drunk with wine; we shall lie with him and have the race survive through our father." <sup>33</sup> So they made their father drink wine that night and the elder went to lie with her father. He knew nothing of it, neither when she lay down nor when she left.

<sup>34</sup> The next day the elder daughter said to the younger, "Last night I lay with my father. Let us give him wine again tonight and you go and lie with him. In this way we shall continue the race through our father." <sup>35</sup> Again that night they got their father to drink wine. The younger went and lay with him. He was aware of nothing, neither when she lay with him nor when she left. <sup>36</sup> And the two daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. <sup>37</sup> The elder gave birth to a son and named him Moab. He was the ancestor of the Moabites who live today. <sup>38</sup> The younger, also gave birth to a son and named him Ben-ammi. He is the ancestor of the Ammonites who exist to this day.

#### Abraham and Sarah at Gerar

**20** • <sup>1</sup> Abraham left there for the territory of the Negeb, and lived between Kadesh and Shur; and he stayed for a time in Gerar. <sup>2</sup> Abraham had said of his wife, "She is my sister"; so Abimelech, king of Gerar, sent for Sarah and had her brought to him.

<sup>3</sup> But God came to Abimelech in a dream at night. He said to him, "You are a dead man because of this woman you have taken, for she is a married woman." <sup>4</sup> But Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "My Lord, are you going to kill a pagan who acted with good intention? <sup>5</sup> Didn't he say to me: 'She is my sister'? And she said to me: 'He is my

brother.' I acted in the simplicity of my heart and with innocent hands." <sup>6</sup> God said to him in the dream, "I knew that you did that in the simplicity of your heart and I prevented you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. <sup>7</sup> Now give the woman back to the man for he is a prophet; he will pray for you and you shall live. But if you do not give her back, know that you will surely die; you and all yours will die."

<sup>8</sup> So Abimelech rose early in the morning and called all his officials and told them all these things. The officials were terrified. <sup>9</sup> Abimelech then called Abraham and said to him, "What have you done to us? In what way have I wronged you, for you to bring against me and my kingdom such a grave sin? You have done to me things that should not be done." <sup>10</sup> Abimelech said to Abraham, "Why did you act as you did?" <sup>11</sup> Abraham said, "I thought there is no fear of God at all in this place and they will kill me because of my wife. <sup>12</sup> Yet it is true that she is my sister, the daughter of my father, but not of my mother, and she became my wife. <sup>13</sup> So, when the gods made me wander far from my father's family, I said to her: Now, if you love me, I beg you to say that I am your brother wherever we go."

<sup>14</sup> Abimelech then brought sheep and cattle, male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he had Sarah returned to her husband. <sup>15</sup> And he told Abraham, "See, you have the run of my land; live wherever you please." <sup>16</sup> And to Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand silver coins. It will be as a protection for you, and an evidence for all those who are with you. So none of them will think ill of you." <sup>17</sup> Then Abraham prayed to God and God healed Abimelech, his wife and his servants, so that they were able to have children again. <sup>18</sup> For Yahweh had made it impossible for Abimelech's wife and maids to have more children, because of Abraham's wife, Sarah.

#### The birth of Isaac

**21** • <sup>1</sup> Yahweh was kind to Sarah as he had said, *and fulfilled his promise to her.* <sup>2</sup> Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham *in his old age, at the very time Yahweh had promised.* <sup>3</sup> *Abraham gave the name*

different peoples and their connection with them. Since an age-old hatred separated the Israelites from the Ammonites and the Moabites, the present explanation was not meant to praise them.

• **20.1** The Israelites remembered the conflicts between their wandering ancestors and

the people among whom they lived. The present event is related in three different parts of Genesis with different people as protagonists and in different circumstances (see 12:14 and 26:7).

• **21.1** *Yahweh was kind to Sarah as he had said.* And so, after some years, God fulfills his promise to Abraham (see chapter 18). Isaac

Dt  
32:29  
2K  
20:5

17:5  
18:9

Isaac to the son that Sarah bore him <sup>4</sup>and circumcised him when he was eight days old, as Yahweh had commanded. <sup>5</sup>Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

<sup>6</sup>Sarah said, “God has brought me laughter and everyone who hears of this will laugh with me.” <sup>7</sup>She added, “Who would have told Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have given birth to a son for him in his old age.”

**Abraham dismisses Hagar**

• <sup>8</sup>The child grew and on the day Isaac was weaned, Abraham held a great feast. <sup>9</sup>Sarah saw the child that Hagar, the Egyptian had borne to Abraham, mocking her son <sup>10</sup>and she said to Abraham, “Send this slave girl and her son away; the child of this slave must not share the inheritance with my son, Isaac.”

<sup>11</sup>This matter distressed Abraham because it concerned his son, <sup>12</sup>but God said to him, “Don’t be worried about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to Sarah and do whatever she says, because the race which is called by your name will spring from Isaac. <sup>13</sup>But from the son of your servant I will also form a nation, for he too is your offspring.”

<sup>14</sup>Abraham rose early next morning and gave bread and a skin bag of water

to Hagar. He put the child on her back and sent her away. She went off and wandered in the desert of Beersheba. <sup>15</sup>When there was no more water in the skin, she pushed the boy under one of the bushes, <sup>16</sup>and then went and sat down about a hundred yards away, for she thought, “I cannot bear to see my son die.”

But as she sat there, the child began to wail. <sup>17</sup>God heard him and the Angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said, “What is the matter, Hagar? Don’t be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. <sup>18</sup>Get up, pick the boy up and hold him safely, for I will make him into a great nation.” <sup>19</sup>God then opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She went and filled the skin and gave the boy a drink.

<sup>20</sup>God was with the boy. He grew up and made his home in the wilderness and became an expert archer.

<sup>21</sup>He lived in the desert of Paran and his mother chose a wife for him from the land of Egypt.

<sup>22</sup>At that time Abimelech came with Phicol, the commander of his army, to speak to Abraham, “God is with you in everything you do; <sup>23</sup>swear to me here before God that you will not deal falsely with me or my descendants, but instead you will show to me and the country where you are living the same kindness that I have shown to you.” <sup>24</sup>And Abraham said, “Yes, this I swear.”

<sup>25</sup>Then Abraham complained to Abimelech about a well that Abimelech’s servants had seized. <sup>26</sup>Abimelech said, “I don’t know

16:5 Gal 4:22

Jn 8:31-37

Rom 9:7 Heb 11:18

1K 19:3

16:10 17:20

26:15

is the son of the promise because he was born contrary to all human hope and to fulfill God’s promise (see Gal 4:22 and Rom 9:7).

Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. In the Bible we find some births which occur outside of the normal laws of nature: Samuel, Samson, John the Baptist... all are saviors. These births announce and prefigure the virginal birth of the Savior, Jesus.

• 8. It is easy to guess that this account is a different version of what is given in chapter 16. But in chapter 16 God is given the name Yahweh, and a well in the southern desert is mentioned which suggests that the story has come from the tribes of the south (territory of Judah) whereas the one in chapter 21 comes from the tribes of Israel, in the north.

There are problems in Abraham’s family as in any other family, and God uses them to carry out his plan. It is good for Hagar to leave with her son so that Isaac may receive all of his father’s care. Isaac will inherit, not something material for himself, but God’s promises to his children. God steadfastly realizes his plans, but does not trample on anyone: see how compassionate he is with Hagar.

Abraham had several wives, as important men in his community usually did. The Israelites kept on considering this custom as normal for many years. It was only gradually that God led them to discover the demands marriage.

“The son of the slave girl will not inherit with the son of the free woman” (Gal 4:28; 2 Cor 6:14).



who has done this; you did not tell me and I only heard about it today.”<sup>27</sup> Abraham then took sheep and cattle and gave them to Abimelech and the two men made a treaty.<sup>28</sup> Abraham set aside seven ewe lambs from the flock.<sup>29</sup> Abimelech said to him, “Why have you put aside these seven ewe lambs?”<sup>30</sup> Abraham replied, “Accept these seven lambs from my hand as evidence that I dug this well.”<sup>31</sup> So the place was called Beersheba because the two men took an oath there.<sup>32</sup> After making the treaty at Beersheba, Abimelech went away with Phicol, the commander of his army, and returned to the land of the Philistines.<sup>33</sup> Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beersheba and there he called on Yahweh, the everlasting God.<sup>34</sup> And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Wis  
10:5  
Sir  
44:20  
1Mac  
2:52  
Heb  
11:17  
Jas  
2:21  
Mic  
6:7  
Mt  
10:37

**The sacrifice of Isaac**

**22** • <sup>1</sup>Some time later God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he answered, “Here I am.”<sup>2</sup> Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I shall point out to you.”

<sup>3</sup>Abraham rose early next morning and saddled his donkey and took with him two of his young men and his son Isaac. He chopped wood for the burnt

offering and set out for the place to which God had directed him.<sup>4</sup> On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance,<sup>5</sup> and he said to the young men, “Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship and then we will come back to you.”

<sup>6</sup>Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. He carried in his hand the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,<sup>7</sup> Isaac spoke to Abraham, his father, “Father!”<sup>8</sup> And Abraham replied, “Yes, my son?” Isaac said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for the sacrifice?” Abraham replied, “God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice.”

They went on, the two of them together,<sup>9</sup> until they came to the place to which God had directed them. When Abraham had built the altar and set the wood on it, he bound his son Isaac and laid him on the wood placed on the altar.<sup>10</sup> He then stretched out his hand to seize the knife and slay his son.<sup>11</sup> But the Angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven, “Abraham! Abraham!”

• **22.1** The account of the sacrifice of Isaac shocks us: how could God ask Abraham to sacrifice his son? Doubtless in order to understand this text it should be understood from two different points of view. The text is first a formal condemnation of human sacrifices. We must not forget that at the time this account was drawn up the sacrifice of children was practiced by the Canaanites: many Israelites following the example of the Canaanites thought that such sacrifice was pleasing to God. The prophets strongly opposed this kind of sacrifice (see Jer 19).

In a first instance Abraham sees the immolation of his son Isaac as the will of God but the end of the account clearly states that God prevents him from carrying it out. In a first reading the text also justifies the ransom of firstborn children. All first-fruits belong to God; but unlike the firstborn of animals which are immolated, children are redeemed (Ex 13:13).

The text of Genesis, however, invites us to read in this the example of unflinching faith of the patriarch: God tests his friends in order to increase their faith. God saves his best gifts for those who remain faithful during times when he takes all hope away from them. In the course of his life Abraham had trusted in God's promises

for his son. Now, would Abraham be willing to sacrifice his son and the promises? God has placed him on a road. What will Abraham do when the road appears closed?

After the test, Abraham would know that he loves his son in the same way God loves, because he chose God over his son. We know without doubt that God approves our dedication to a particular task if on some occasion we have shown that we are willing to let go even of that task, if God wills it so.

Likewise when our hope in God's promises seems to fall to pieces, only true love can keep us faithful.

But no explanation can soothe our wounded sensibilities on seeing how God imposes on Abraham the most costly sacrifice for a father. Is there no other way to bring us to perfect love? Though Abraham is a believer and God's friend, he is also a sinful man and only “surgery” can purify his heart. Here, it is Abraham who dies, not Isaac; and yet through his sacrifice, Abraham achieves life (see Lk 17:33; Rom 4:17; Heb 11:19).

The Christian tradition has seen in this account of Abraham sacrificing his son a prefigurement of God the Father giving his own Son to save sinners. Though the terms sacrifice, suf-

Jn  
19:17

Jn 3:16  
Rom 8:32  
And he said, "Here I am."<sup>12</sup> "Do not lay your hand on the boy; do not harm him, for now I know that you fear God, and you have not held back from me your only son."

<sup>13</sup> Abraham looked around and saw behind him a ram caught by its horns in a bush. He offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son. <sup>14</sup> Abraham named the place 'The Lord will provide.' And the saying has lasted to this day.

Heb 6:13  
<sup>15</sup> And the Angel of Yahweh called from heaven a second time, <sup>16</sup> "By myself I have sworn, it is Yahweh who speaks, because you have done this and not held back your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the lands of their enemies. <sup>18</sup> All the nations of the earth will be blessed through your descendants because you have obeyed me."

12:2  
15:5  
<sup>19</sup> So Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba and it was there that Abraham stayed.

Job 1:1  
24:15  
<sup>20</sup> Some time after this Abraham was told that Milcah too, had borne children for Nahor, Abraham's brother: <sup>21</sup> Uz, the firstborn, Buz, his brother, Kemuel the father of Aram, <sup>22</sup> Chesed, Hazo, Pildash, Jidlap and Bethuel. <sup>23</sup> Bethuel became the father of Rebekah. These eight children Milcah gave Nahor, Abraham's brother. <sup>24</sup> He also had a concubine, named Reumah, who gave birth to Tebah, Gaham, Tahash and Maacah.

**The tomb of Abraham and Sarah**

**23** <sup>1</sup> Sarah lived a hundred and twenty-seven years. <sup>2</sup> She died at Kiriatharba – that is Hebron – in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went in to weep and mourn for Sarah.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham left his dead one <sup>4</sup> and spoke to the Hittites, "I am only a stranger among you;

give me a burial place among you, so that I may bury my dead."<sup>5</sup> The Hittites answered Abraham, <sup>6</sup> "Hear us, my lord. You are God's prince among us; bury your dead in the best of our tombs; none of us would refuse you a tomb to bury your dead."<sup>7</sup> Abraham rose and bowed to the Hittites, the people of the land, <sup>8</sup> and then spoke to them, "If you are willing that I bury my dead, hear me and plead with Ephron, the son of Zohar, <sup>9</sup> to give me the cave of Machpelah belonging to him; it is at the edge of his field. For the full price and in your presence, let him give it to me for a burial place."<sup>10</sup> Now Ephron was there sitting among the Hittites, and he replied to Abraham in the hearing of all who were seated at the gate of the town, <sup>11</sup> "No, my lord, listen! I give you the field and I give you the cave in it. In the presence of the sons of my people, I give it to you. Bury your dead there."

<sup>12</sup> Abraham bowed before the people of the land and spoke to Ephron in the hearing of the people of the land, <sup>13</sup> "Ah, if only you will listen to me, I will give you the price of the land. Accept it from me that I may bury my dead there."<sup>14</sup> Ephron replied to Abraham, "My lord, hear me. <sup>15</sup> Four hundred silver coins for a piece of land, is it not the right price for both of us? Bury your dead."<sup>16</sup> Abraham agreed with Ephron and he weighed out for Ephron the silver he had insisted on in the hearing of the Hittites, four hundred silver coins, in merchants' coins.

<sup>17</sup> And so Ephron's field in Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, the field with the cave in it, and all the trees in the field, throughout its entire area, <sup>18</sup> was acquired by Abraham as his possession in the presence of the Hittites and of all who went in at the gate of their city. <sup>19</sup> After this Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave of Machpelah. <sup>20</sup> The unused field and the cave that is in it were given to Abraham as a possession for a burying place by the Hittites.

**Eliezer finds a wife for Isaac**

**24** <sup>1</sup> Abraham was now old and well on in years, and Yahweh had blessed him in every way. <sup>2</sup> Abraham said to his senior servant, who was his steward, "Put your hand under my thigh <sup>3</sup> and you will swear to me by Yahweh, God of heaven and earth, that you will

fering, love have not the same meaning for God as for ourselves, we should not think that an indifferent and pitiless God asks of us sacrifices of which he has no experience (Rom 5:8; 8:32).

• **23.1** Abraham travels throughout Palestine without ever having a place of his own (Heb

7:9); he holds everything as a promise. Sarah's death however, gives Abraham the opportunity, at least, to buy a place for her burial.

• **24.1** You will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom we live. Isaac is the "son of the

Jer 32:9

47:29

24:37

not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom we live; <sup>4</sup>rather it is to my country and my kinsfolk that you will go to choose a wife for my son, Isaac.”

<sup>5</sup>The servant said to him, “Perhaps the woman will not want to follow me to this country. In that case should I take your son to the country you came from?” <sup>6</sup>Abraham said to him, “In no way will you take my son back. <sup>7</sup>For Yahweh, God of heaven and God of earth, who took me from my father’s house and from the land of my birth, spoke to me and swore to me that he would give this country to my race. He will send his angel before you, that you may find a wife for my son. <sup>8</sup>But if the woman is unwilling to follow you, you will be free of this oath. In any case you are not to take my son down there.” <sup>9</sup>So the servant placed his hand under the thigh of Abraham, his master, and swore to him that he would do it.

<sup>10</sup>The servant took ten of his master’s camels and set out, taking with him something of the best from all that his master owned. He rose and went off in the direction of Aram Naharaim, towards the town of Nahor. <sup>11</sup>And he made the camels kneel outside the town, near the well, in the evening when the women go to draw water.

<sup>12</sup>The steward then prayed, “Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, be with me and show your loving kindness to Abraham, my master. <sup>13</sup>See, I am standing at the spring while the girls of the city are coming to draw water. <sup>14</sup>Now I will ask them like this: ‘Please tilt your pitcher that I may drink.’ Now, the first girl who will say: ‘Drink and I will water your camels as well’; let her be the one you have chosen for your

servant Isaac. In this way I shall know you have shown kindness to my master.”

<sup>15</sup>He had not finished praying when Rebekah came out. She was the daughter of Bethuel, son of Milcah, wife of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. She had a pitcher on her shoulder. <sup>16</sup>The girl was very beautiful and a virgin, for no man had lain with her. She went down to the well, filled her pitcher and came up again. <sup>17</sup>The servant ran to meet her and said, “Please let me drink a little water from your pitcher.” <sup>18</sup>She said, “Drink, my lord!” and at once lowering her pitcher to her hand she let him drink. <sup>19</sup>When she had finished letting him drink, she said, “I am going to water your camels as well, until they have had enough.” <sup>20</sup>She hurried to empty her pitcher into the trough, and then ran again to draw water for all his camels, <sup>21</sup>while the man watched in silence to find out whether Yahweh was making his journey successful or not.

<sup>22</sup>So when the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing half a shekel and for her arms two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels. <sup>23</sup>He then said, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me! Is there room in your father’s house where we can spend the night?” <sup>24</sup>She said to him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son Milcah bore to Nahor.” <sup>25</sup>She continued, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, and room for you to spend the night.”

<sup>26</sup>Then the man knelt and worshiped Yahweh <sup>27</sup>saying, “Blessed be Yahweh, God of my master Abraham, who has not stopped showing kindness and faithfulness to my master. Yahweh has guided me to the house of my

promise,” and faithfulness to this promise is Abraham’s great concern. The marriage of his son to a Canaanite woman, whose people are accustomed to pagan worship, would endanger this faithfulness.

To belong to Abraham’s family and to become the mother of the chosen people, Rebekah must

also give up her home and her land.

*Let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac.* God guides those who seek to do his will, above all when they choose to marry; he will enable them to meet the person best suited to help them realize this desire. Such will also be the subject of the Book of Tobit.

master's brother." <sup>28</sup>The girl ran to her mother's house and related all these things. <sup>29</sup>Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban and Laban ran out to the man, near the spring. <sup>30</sup>As soon as he saw the ring and the bracelets on his sister's arms, as soon as he heard his sister Rebekah saying, "This is what the man said to me..." he came towards Abraham's steward who was standing near the camels by the spring. <sup>31</sup>He said to him, "Come in, you who are blessed by Yahweh. Why do you stay outside? I have prepared the house and there is room for your camels." <sup>32</sup>So the man entered the house and unloaded the camels. Straw and fodder were given to the camels and water to wash the feet of the man and of those who were with him. <sup>33</sup>Then they gave him food to eat, but he said, "I won't eat until I have said what I have to say!" Laban said, "Speak!"

<sup>34</sup>Then he spoke like this, "I am the servant of Abraham. Yahweh has greatly blessed my master and he has become very rich. <sup>35</sup>Yahweh has given him flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, camels and donkeys. <sup>36</sup>Now Sarah, my master's wife, bore him a son in her old age; <sup>37</sup>so my master has given him all he owns and he made me swear an oath saying: 'You will not choose a wife for my son from the daughters of these Canaanites in whose country I live; <sup>38</sup>rather you will go to my father's house, to my kinsfolk and there you will choose a wife for my son.' <sup>39</sup>I then said to my master, 'Perhaps the woman will not agree to come with me!' <sup>40</sup>And his reply was: 'Yahweh, in whose presence I have walked, will send his angel with you and make your journey successful. You will choose a wife for my son from my own clan and from my father's house. <sup>41</sup>This is what you have to do to be released from your oath. Whether they refuse you or not you will be free of the oath.'

<sup>42</sup>So on arriving at the spring, I prayed, 'Yahweh, God of my master, Abraham, if you wish my journey to be successful, let it happen like this: <sup>43</sup>as I stand by the spring a girl will come to draw water and I will say to her: Let me drink a little from your pitcher. <sup>44</sup>If she answers me: Yes, drink, and I will draw water for your camels as well, let it be that she is the wife Yahweh has chosen for my master's son.' I was still thinking this over, <sup>45</sup>when

Rebekah came out with a pitcher on her shoulder. She went down to the spring and drew water. I said to her, 'Please, let me drink!' <sup>46</sup>She immediately lowered the pitcher and said, 'Drink! I will water your camels as well!' I drank and she watered the camels. <sup>47</sup>I questioned her saying, 'Who is your father?' And she said, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Nahor and Milcah.' I then put this ring through her nostril and bracelets on her arms. <sup>48</sup>Then I knelt in worship and blessed Yahweh, God of my master, Abraham, who had led me to choose the daughter of my master's brother for his son. <sup>49</sup>Now let me know whether you intend to show kindness and faithfulness to my master; if not, tell me and I shall know which way to turn."

<sup>50</sup>Laban and Bethuel replied, "This is God's doing. It is not for us to decide either way. <sup>51</sup>Here is Rebekah, take her and go. Let her become the wife of your master's son as Yahweh has directed." <sup>52</sup>When Abraham's servant heard this answer, he bowed to the ground before Yahweh. <sup>53</sup>He then took the gold and silver jewelry as well as the clothes and gave them to Rebekah. He also gave costly gifts to her brother and mother. <sup>54</sup>They ate and drank, he and his companions, and spent the night there.

When they were up next morning, the servant said, "Let me return to my master." <sup>55</sup>Rebekah's mother and brother replied, "Let the girl remain with us for a few days, about ten. After that she may go." <sup>56</sup>He said, "Do not delay me; since Yahweh has made my journey successful, let me leave and return to my master." <sup>57</sup>They then said, "Call the girl and ask her about it." <sup>58</sup>They called and questioned Rebekah, "Do you want to leave with this man?" She said, "I will go." <sup>59</sup>So they let Rebekah, their sister, go with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. <sup>60</sup>They blessed Rebekah with these words,

"Sister of ours, may you increase to thousands upon thousands, may your descendants take possession of the cities of their enemies."

<sup>61</sup>Then Rebekah and her maids got ready, mounted the camels and fol-

lowed Abraham's servant. So it was that he departed bringing Rebekah.

<sup>62</sup> Now Isaac had come from the well of Lahai-roi, for he was living in the Negeb. <sup>63</sup> As Isaac went out in the early evening to meditate in the field, he looked up and saw camels coming. <sup>64</sup> Rebekah also looked up and when she saw Isaac she alighted from her camel <sup>65</sup> and said to the servant, "Who is this man in the field coming to meet us?" He replied, "It is my master!" She then covered her face with her veil. <sup>66</sup> The servant related to Isaac all that he had done <sup>67</sup> and Isaac brought Rebekah into the tent of Sarah, his mother. He made her his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.

#### Abraham and his descendants

**25** • <sup>1</sup> Abraham married another wife named Keturah. <sup>2</sup> She bore him Zimram, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak and Shuah. <sup>3</sup> Jokshan was the father of Sheba and Dedan, and the sons of Dedan were the Asshurites, the Letushites, and the Leummites. <sup>4</sup> The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoah, Abida and Eldaah. All these were descendants of Keturah.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham left everything he owned to Isaac. <sup>6</sup> To the sons of his concubines Abraham gave presents, and as long as he lived he sent them away from his son Isaac, to the land of the east.

<sup>7</sup> Abraham had lived a hundred and seventy-five years. <sup>8</sup> Then at a good old age Abraham breathed his last, an old man, after a full span of years, and was gathered to his ancestors. <sup>9</sup> His sons, Isaac and Ishmael, buried him in the cave at Machpelah, <sup>10</sup> in the field of Ephron the Hittite, son of Zohar. This was the field near Mamre that Abraham

• **25.1** Medan, Midian, Sheba, Dedan: these are names of tribes and peoples of Arabia. Since the Israelites considered them their relatives by race and language, they wanted them to also be Abraham's descendants.

• 21. We may be astonished that the Israelites called themselves the sons of Israel (or sons of Jacob) rather than the sons of Abraham.

Let us remember first what has been said in the Introduction: the sequence Abraham, father of Isaac, father of Jacob is only a construction of the history of these first fathers of the people of God. These three names were kept in the early traditions of different regions, and the corresponding

bought from the Hittites. Abraham and his wife, Sarah, were buried there. <sup>11</sup> After Abraham's death God blessed his son Isaac who lived near the well of Lahai-roi.

<sup>12</sup> These are the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, the Egyptian. <sup>13</sup> These are the names of the sons of Ishmael in order of their birth. Ishmael's firstborn was Nebaioth, and after him Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, <sup>14</sup> Mishma, Dumah, Massa, <sup>15</sup> Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish and Kedemah. <sup>16</sup> These are the sons of Ishmael, and these are their names, according to their settlements and camps, twelve tribal princes. <sup>17</sup> Ishmael lived a hundred and thirty-seven years. He breathed his last and died and was gathered to his people.

<sup>18</sup> His descendants lived in the territory stretching from Havilah to Shur, near the border of Egypt in the direction of Assyria. They have been fighting continually among themselves.

<sup>19</sup> This is the story of Isaac, son of Abraham. <sup>20</sup> Isaac was forty when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel, the Aramean from Paddan-aram, the sister of Laban the Aramean.

#### The birth of Esau and Jacob

• <sup>21</sup> Isaac prayed to Yahweh for his wife, because she could not have children. Yahweh heard Isaac's prayer and Rebekah, his wife, conceived. <sup>22</sup> As the children struggled together within her, she said, "If it is like this, why do I continue to live?" She went to consult Yahweh, <sup>23</sup> and Yahweh said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples will be born of you; one nation will be stronger than the other, and the elder shall serve the younger."

<sup>24</sup> When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb. <sup>25</sup> The first to be born was red and his

persons had not lived at the same time. Abraham would have lived in the 18th century before Jesus, Isaac doubtless a little later, but in another corner of Southern Palestine, at Gerar, and Jacob in the 16th or 15th century. If the name of Abraham has been eclipsed by that of Jacob the reason is without a doubt the following.

Abraham was in fact the great patriarch of the south of Palestine, he had settled in Mamre, near Hebron; he was taken to be the ancestor of David. Did David not reign in Hebron? Popular traditions recounted in the Bible come from the tribes established in central Palestine, where the powerful kingdom of Israel would be established after the schism. Then it seems that in this

Ex  
2:15

38:27

Mal  
1:2  
Rom  
9:12

whole body was like a hairy garment, so they called him Esau. <sup>Hos 12:4</sup> 26 Then his brother was born and his hand had gripped Esau's heel so he was named Jacob. *Isaac was sixty at the time of their birth.*

<sup>27:3</sup> 27 When the boys grew up, Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country; Jacob was a quiet man living in tents. <sup>28</sup> Isaac who had a liking for game loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

<sup>29</sup> Once when Jacob was making a stew, Esau came back from the country and he was famished; <sup>30</sup> and he said to Jacob, "Let me have some of that red stew, for I am famished." That is why he was also called Edom. <sup>31</sup> Jacob said, <sup>Dt 21:17</sup> "First sell me your right as the firstborn." <sup>32</sup> Esau said, "Since I am to die soon, what good is my right as the firstborn to me?" <sup>33</sup> Then Jacob said, "Give me your oath first." So he swore to him and sold his firstborn right to Jacob. <sup>34</sup> Then Jacob gave him bread and the lentil stew. Esau ate and drank

northern kingdom the figure of Abraham was "demoted" with the first place given to Israel—Jacob; then they had the twelve tribes descending from the "twelve sons" of Jacob.

*Two nations are in your womb* (v. 23). We must not forget that, in this story, each character represents a group of people bearing the same name. Just as Jacob—Israel was considered the ancestor of the Israelites, so Esau or *Edom* (25:31) was considered the ancestor of the Edomites, neighbors and rivals of the Israelites.

These chapters show the freedom of God who chooses the Israelites rather than the Edomites to be the instrument of his salvation; even among the Israelites God chooses whom he wants to be put in charge of a more or less transcendent mission.

In this chapter we are given three reasons for the rejection of Esau:

- A passage in chapter 25 shows Esau to be guilty: he himself scorned his sacred rights as eldest son.

- Another passage, 26:34, mentions his marriage to foreign women.

- A third passage (in chapter 27) shows how God takes advantage of one of Jacob's tricks to achieve his goals. The Israelites were not very scrupulous about lying. For them Jacob's trick only showed that he was determined to get God's promises by any means, and in so doing, he becomes deserving of these promises.

In Hebrews 12:16 Esau will be mentioned as

and then got up and went his way. So it was that Esau thought nothing of his right as the firstborn. <sup>Heb 12:16</sup>

#### Events in Isaac's life

**26** <sup>1</sup> There was a famine in the land – a second one after the famine that had taken place in the time of Abraham – and Isaac went to Gerar, the land of Abimelech, king of the Philistines. <sup>2</sup> For Yahweh appeared to him and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land I shall tell you of. <sup>3</sup> Remain in this land, and I will be with you and I will bless you. I will give all these lands to you and your race, and I shall keep the oath I swore to your father, Abraham. For I told him: <sup>4</sup> I will make your descendants as many as the stars in the heavens, and to them I will give all these lands; and through your descendants all nations in the world will be blessed <sup>5</sup> because you were obedient and kept my charge, my commandments, my decrees and my laws." <sup>22:18</sup>

<sup>6</sup> So Isaac stayed in Gerar. <sup>7</sup> When the men of that place questioned him about his wife, he replied, "She is my sister." He would not say, "She is my wife," for he was afraid and he thought, "The men of this place might kill me because of Rebekah who is very beautiful."

<sup>8</sup> When Isaac had been there a long time, it happened that Abimelech, looking out of a window, saw Isaac caressing his wife Rebekah. <sup>9</sup> Abimelech called Isaac and said,

an example of a godless person, one who sells God's blessing for a meal. How many lost opportunities in our own life: stupid things in life have bewitched us and caused us to miss what alone is worth keeping!

- **26.1** About verses 7-11, see 20:2.

In chapters 12–33 we become acquainted with two realities in the lives of the patriarchs: they are nomads who live in tents; they roam in search of water and dig wells (see 21:21-34).

*They live in camping tents*, that is to say, as transients without a permanent home. The Bible appreciates the work of people who build something lasting in this world. Those who found a home, plant a vineyard or build a house are praised (Dt 20:5-7) since all of this is connected with the creative mission of women and men. Yet, the Bible also remembers the nomadic life of Israel's forefathers as an ideal which should not be lost (Jer 35). The believer does not become attached to anything in this world... to family, homeland or lifestyle. He pitches his tent wherever he can but does not settle in any one place. Living as a stranger in this world, it will be easier for him to encounter God who also passes as a stranger among us (in Jn 1:14 the exact translation should be: *the Word pitched his tent among us*). See Ex 33:7; 40:34; 2 S 7:7; Sir 24:8; 2 Cor 5:1-4; 1 P 2:11.

The patriarchs *dig wells*. They do not find fountains of spring water in the desert, instead

“So she really is your wife! Why did you tell me that she was your sister?” Isaac said to him, “Because I thought that they might kill me on her account.” <sup>10</sup> Then Abimelech said, “What is this you have done to us? One of my people could have slept with your wife and you would have brought guilt on us.” <sup>11</sup> So Abimelech gave an order to all the people: “Whoever molests this man or his wife will be put to death.”

<sup>12</sup> Isaac sowed crops on this land and that same year he harvested a hundredfold. Yahweh blessed him <sup>13</sup> and he prospered. He continued to prosper until he was very rich. <sup>14</sup> He had flocks and herds and many servants so that the Philistines envied him. <sup>15</sup> All the wells dug by his father’s servants in Abraham’s time were stopped up by the Philistines and filled with earth. <sup>16</sup> Abimelech said to Isaac, “Go away from us for you are more powerful than we are.” <sup>17</sup> So Isaac left that place and encamped in the Valley of Gerar and settled there.

<sup>18</sup> Isaac opened up again the wells that had been dug in the time of his father, Abraham, and that the Philistines had blocked up after Abraham’s death. He gave these wells the names his father had given them. <sup>19</sup> Isaac’s servants dug in the valley and discovered there a fresh water spring. <sup>20</sup> The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with Isaac’s herdsmen saying, “The water is ours!” So he named the well Esek, because they *squabbled* about it. <sup>21</sup> They dug another well and there was *quarreling* about that as well, so he called it Sitnah. <sup>22</sup> He moved away from there and dug another well and as no one quarreled over it, he called it Rehoboth saying, “Now the Lord has *made room* for us, we shall prosper in the land.”

<sup>23</sup> From there Isaac went to Beersheba, <sup>24</sup> and Yahweh appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of Abraham, your father; do not be afraid, for I am with you. I will bless you and increase your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham.”

<sup>25</sup> Isaac built an altar there and called on the name of Yahweh. It was there he pitched his tent and there his servants dug a well.

<sup>26</sup> Abimelech went to him from Gerar together with Ahuzzath, his friend, and Phicol, the commander of his forces. <sup>27</sup> Isaac said to him, “Why have you come after me seeing that you hate me and have sent me away?”

<sup>28</sup> They answered, “We have clearly seen that Yahweh is with you, so we said: Let peace be

sworn between us and you, and let us make a treaty: <sup>29</sup> you will do us no harm, just as we have not interfered with you, but always treated you well and sent you away in peace. We know that you have Yahweh’s blessing.”

<sup>30</sup> Isaac then made a feast for them and they ate and drank. <sup>31</sup> Next morning they rose early and swore an oath to each other. Isaac then set them on their way and they left him in peace. <sup>32</sup> That day Isaac’s servants came and told him of the well they had dug: “We have found water.” <sup>33</sup> He called the well Shibeah and that is why the name of the town has been Beersheba to this day.

<sup>34</sup> *When Esau was forty, he married Judith, daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and Basemath, the daughter of Elon, the Hittite.* <sup>35</sup> *They made life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah.*

### Jacob obtains the blessing by deceit

**27** <sup>1</sup> When Isaac was old and his eyes so weak that he could no longer see, he called Esau, his older son, and said to him, “My son.” “Here I am,” he answered. <sup>2</sup> Isaac continued, “You see I am old and I don’t know when I shall die; <sup>3</sup> so take your weapons, your bow and arrow, go out into the country and hunt some game for me. <sup>4</sup> Then prepare some of the savory food I like and bring it to me so that I may eat and give you my blessing before I die.”

<sup>5</sup> Now Rebekah was listening when Isaac spoke to his son Esau. When Esau went into the country to hunt game and bring it back, <sup>6</sup> Rebekah said to her son Jacob, “I heard your father saying to your brother Esau: <sup>7</sup> ‘Bring me some game and prepare food for me that I may eat and bless you before Yahweh before I die.’ <sup>8</sup> Now my son, listen and do what I command you. <sup>9</sup> Go to the flock and bring me two fine kids so that I can prepare for your father the food that he likes. <sup>10</sup> You will bring it to your father and he will eat it and give you his blessing before he dies.”

<sup>11</sup> Jacob said to Rebekah, “My

they must painfully dig wells which make the desert fertile and provide drink for their flocks. At times the water runs out; at other times, the Philistines plug up their wells with dirt. All of this symbolizes human effort to find wisdom; people are often left thirsty and there are always those

who muddy the fountains of wisdom. People will run from one well to another until Christ gives them the spring water *springing from the Rock* which is himself. See Ex 17:1; Jn 4:5-10; 7:38; 1 Cor 10:4; Jer 2:13.

Ex 1:9

Dt 28:4  
Lev 26:38:20  
4:26  
12:739:3  
15  
18:1431:54  
Ex  
24:11

36:1

1K  
1:16

brother Esau is a hairy man and I am smooth-skinned. <sup>12</sup>Perhaps my father will feel me and I will seem to be tricking him and so bring a curse on myself instead of a blessing.” <sup>13</sup>But his mother said, “Let the curse fall on me, my son! Only do what I tell you; go and get the kids for me.” <sup>14</sup>So he went and got them and took them to his mother to prepare food that his father liked. <sup>15</sup>Then Rebekah took the best clothes of her elder son Esau that she had in the house and put them on Jacob, her younger son. <sup>16</sup>With the goatskin she covered his hands and the smooth part of his neck, <sup>17</sup>and she handed to him the bread and food she had prepared.

<sup>18</sup>He went to his father and said, “Father!” He answered, “Yes, my son, who is it?” <sup>19</sup>and Jacob said to his father, “It is Esau, your firstborn; I have done what you told me to do. Come, sit up and eat my game so that you may give me your blessing.” <sup>20</sup>Isaac said, “How quick you have been my son!” Jacob said, “Yahweh, your God, guided me.” <sup>21</sup>Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near and let me feel you, my son, and know that it is you, Esau my son, or not.”

<sup>22</sup>When Jacob drew near to Isaac, his father felt him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob but the hands are the hands of Esau.” <sup>23</sup>He did not recognize him, for his hands were hairy like the hands of Esau his brother and so he blessed him. <sup>24</sup>He asked, “Are you really my son Esau?” and Jacob answered, “I am.” <sup>25</sup>Isaac said, “Bring me some of your game, my son, so that I may eat and give you my blessing.” So Jacob brought it to him and he ate. And he brought him wine and he drank. <sup>26</sup>Then his father Isaac said to him, “Come near and kiss me, my son.” <sup>27</sup>So Jacob came near and kissed him.

Isaac then caught the smell of his clothes and blessed him, saying,

“The smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed.

<sup>28</sup>May God give you of the dew of heaven;

and of the richness of the earth;  
and abundance of grain and wine.

<sup>29</sup>Let peoples serve you  
and nations bow down before you.  
Be lord over your brothers,  
and let your mother’s sons bow down to you.

Cursed be everyone that curses you  
and blessed be everyone  
that blesses you!”

<sup>30</sup>When Isaac had finished blessing him and Jacob had just left Isaac’s room, Esau came in from hunting. <sup>31</sup>He also prepared food and brought it to his father and said to him, “Father, sit up and eat the game your son has prepared, so that you may give me your blessing.” <sup>32</sup>Isaac said, “Who are you?” “I am your son, your firstborn, Esau.” <sup>33</sup>Isaac trembled violently and said, “Who was it then that hunted game and brought it to me? I ate it all before you came and I blessed him and he will be blessed.”

<sup>34</sup>On hearing his father’s words, Esau gave a loud and bitter cry and said, “Bless me, too, father.” <sup>35</sup>But Isaac said, “Your brother came deceitfully and took your blessing.” <sup>36</sup>Esau said, “Is it because he is called Jacob that he has supplanted me twice? First he took my birthright and now he has taken my blessing.” Then he asked, “Haven’t you kept a blessing for me?” <sup>37</sup>Isaac answered Esau, “I have made him your lord. I have given him all his brothers as servants; I have provided him with grain and wine. What can I do for you, my son?”

<sup>38</sup>Esau said to his father, “Have you only one blessing? Father, bless me, too.” Then Esau wept aloud. <sup>39</sup>Isaac then gave him this answer,

“Your dwelling place shall be far away from the richness of the earth,  
away from the dew of heaven above.

<sup>40</sup>You shall live by your sword, and you shall serve your brother;

<sup>49</sup>  
Dt  
33:13

37:8

31:54  
Ex  
24:11

36:1

Hos  
12:4

Heb  
11:20

Jos  
24:4  
Mal  
1:3



but when you win your freedom you will throw off his yoke from your neck.”

#### Jacob flees to the house of Laban

<sup>41</sup> Now Esau continued to hate his brother because of the blessing his father had given him and he thought to himself, “The time of mourning for my father is near; I shall then kill my brother Jacob.” <sup>42</sup> When Rebekah was told what her elder son had said, she sent and called her younger son, Jacob, and said to him, “Your brother Esau is consoling himself with the thought of killing you. <sup>43</sup> Now my son, listen to me and flee to Laban, my brother, in Haran. <sup>44</sup> You will stay with him for a time <sup>45</sup> until your brother’s fury has cooled; and when he has forgotten his anger and what you did to him, I will send someone to bring you back. Why should I lose both of you on the same day?”

<sup>46</sup> Rebekah said to Isaac, “I am weary of my life because of the Hittite women. If Jacob marries a woman from this land, a Hittite like these, what value is there left in life for me?”

Wis  
10:10  
  
26:35  
27:43  
Ezra  
10  
Ne  
13:23

**28** <sup>1</sup> Isaac summoned Jacob and blessed him and commanded him, “Do not marry a Canaanite woman. <sup>2</sup> Go to Paddan-aram, to the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, and choose a wife for yourself from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother. <sup>3</sup> May God Almighty bless you and make you increase to become a group of nations. <sup>4</sup> May he grant you and your descendants the blessings of Abraham, so that you may take pos-

• **28.10** *Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.* Jacob goes to the land of his ancestors in search of work and a wife. On the road, he has a vision in which God renews his Covenant with him.

Unlike Abraham, whom God called when he was already old and who knew the value of life, Jacob is a young man who becomes aware of his vocation gradually. First, he buys the rights of the firstborn from Esau whom he has judged and considered irresponsible; but he still does not know the price of God’s blessing to his fathers. Then, his mother has to give him courage so that he can take the risk of stealing the blessing. He lets her persuade him and only afterwards does he understand the consequences of his action: he has to escape in order to save his life.

But just when Jacob has to face the hazardous life of a foreigner and a fugitive, he meets God and for the first time he becomes conscious of his own responsibility: he is the bearer of God’s promises to the world. People become responsible when they realize that they are accountable to others and must answer for their actions. Jacob understands that he will be accountable to the God who has chosen him.

*Yahweh was in this place!* Jacob, alone and defenseless, goes to sleep near a city inhabited by strangers. But God renews with him the

*session of the land where you live now, and that Yahweh gave to Abraham.* <sup>5</sup> Isaac sent Jacob away and he went to Paddan-aram to Laban, the son of Bethuel, the Aramean, brother to Rebekah.

<sup>6</sup> Esau saw that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to Paddan-aram to choose a wife for himself, and in blessing him had commanded him, “Do not marry a Canaanite woman.” <sup>7</sup> And in obedience to his father and mother, Jacob had gone to Paddan-aram. <sup>8</sup> So Esau understood how displeasing the Canaanite women were to his father Isaac. <sup>9</sup> So he went to Ishmael and chose a wife for himself besides those he already had – Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael, son of Abraham and sister of Nebaioth.

#### Jacob’s dream

• <sup>10</sup> Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. <sup>11</sup> When he reached a certain place the sun had set and he spent the night there. He took one of the stones that were there and using it as a pillow, he lay down to sleep.

<sup>12</sup> While Jacob was sleeping, he had a dream in which a ladder stood on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and on it were angels of God going up and coming down. <sup>13</sup> And Yahweh was standing there near him and said, “I am

Jn  
1:51

12:3  
15:5  
26:4

promises made to his fathers and assures him of his protection: some day this land will be his.

*This is the gate to heaven.* Jacob has seen the heavens open and the angels of God forming a living bridge between heaven and earth: this is an image of the communion with God which people seek in vain with their various religions. These may give us some external knowledge of God and satisfy our religious instincts. Even if we interiorize our search for God, we are sinful people who cannot find his inner presence without being called by him.

The only bridge between God and humankind is Christ: Son of God become man, both God and human. Later, in referring to this text (Jn 1:51) Jesus will declare that he is the Gate to heaven, because in him, God has embraced humanity.

*He called it Bethel.* Here, as in previous chapters, we find popular legends. Bethel means the house of God and the biblical author attributes to Jacob this naming of the place as well as the custom of paying a *tithe* to the temple of Bethel. This had been built many centuries before Jacob.

#### DREAMS

All of us are impressed by dreams and we try to interpret them. Most of the time they do not

Yahweh, the God of your father, Abraham, and the God of Isaac. The land on which you sleep, I give to you and your descendants. <sup>14</sup>Your descendants will be numerous like the specks of dust of the earth and you will spread out to the west and the east, to the north and the south. Through you and your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed. <sup>15</sup>See, I am with you and I will keep you safe wherever you go. I will bring you back to this land and not leave you until I have done what I promised.” <sup>16</sup>Jacob woke from his dream and said, “Truly Yahweh was in this place and I was not aware of it.”

<sup>Ex 3:5</sup> <sup>Is 6:5</sup> <sup>17</sup>He was afraid and said, “How full of awe is this place! It is nothing less than a *House of God*; it is the Gate to Heaven!”

<sup>35:14</sup> <sup>Hos 12:5</sup> <sup>Jdg 1:22</sup> <sup>18</sup>Then Jacob rose early and took the stone he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. <sup>19</sup>He named that place Bethel although before that it was called Luz. <sup>20</sup>Then Jacob made a vow, <sup>31:13</sup> “If Yahweh will be with me and keep me safe during this journey I am making, if he gives me bread to eat and clothes to wear, <sup>21</sup>and if I return in peace to my father’s house, then Yahweh will be my God. <sup>22</sup>This stone which I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all that you give me, I will give back a tenth.”

<sup>14:20</sup> <sup>Am 4:4</sup>

**Jacob arrives at Laban’s home**

**29** <sup>• 1</sup> Jacob set out and came to the land of the people of the east. <sup>2</sup>There he saw a well and lying beside the well were three flocks of sheep, for it was at this well that the flocks were watered, and a large stone covered the mouth of the well. <sup>3</sup>Then when all the flocks gathered there, the shepherds rolled away the stone from the opening of the well, watered their flocks and replaced the stone at the mouth of the well. <sup>4</sup>Jacob said to them, “Brothers, where are you from?” “We are from Haran,” they replied. <sup>5</sup>He then said, “Do you know Laban, Nahor’s son?” “Yes, we know him,” they replied. <sup>6</sup>And Jacob asked, “Is he well?” “Yes, he is well,” they said, “and here is Rachel, his daughter, coming with the sheep!”

<sup>24:11</sup> <sup>Ex 2:16</sup>

<sup>24:15</sup>

<sup>7</sup>Jacob then said, “Look! The sun is still high; it’s not yet time for the flocks to be gathered together. Water the sheep and let them graze.” <sup>8</sup>But they said, “We cannot do that until all the flocks are gathered together and the stone is rolled away from the mouth of the well; it’s then we water the sheep.”

<sup>9</sup>He was still speaking when Rachel arrived with her father’s flock, for she looked after them. <sup>10</sup>As soon as Jacob saw Rachel he went forward and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well and then watered Laban’s flock. <sup>11</sup>Then Jacob kissed Rachel and wept aloud.

<sup>12</sup>Jacob told Rachel he was her father’s kinsman and Rebekah’s son, and she ran and told her father. <sup>13</sup>As soon as Laban heard the news about Jacob being his sister’s son, he ran to meet him; and after embracing and kissing him he brought him into his house. Jacob told Laban all that had happened <sup>14</sup>and Laban said to him, “Truly you are my bone and flesh!” And Jacob stayed there a month with him.

foretell anything but simply reveal what is going on within us, in our subconscious, and disclose something of what we cannot know clearly about our own spirit. Psychologists may use dreams to discover significant experiences or wounds suffered in the past.

Dreams may also indicate and express premonitions and intuitions. The Bible shows us God (or his angels) using dreams to communicate with us. In this, God takes people as they are with the underground part of their soul.

When God intervenes through a dream, we know it by its consequences. Jesus says “The tree is known by its fruits.” In such cases, it is God himself who gives the interpretation: we do not need to resort to anyone and God fills us with a sense of complete peace.

People whose faith has been purified and formed cannot attribute to dreams the same importance given them by the primitive people

of biblical times. We also know that the Spirit of Darkness can disguise himself as an angel (2 Cor 12:10). When, in our days, large segments of humankind tend to lead their lives according to dreams, it has little to do with faith. In the very Bible itself, besides the condemnations of Dt 18:10, we can also read in Jer 29:8 his attack directed against those who induce the dreams they wish to have (see also Sir 24:1).

• **29.1** Chapters 29–31 present Jacob as a cunning and enterprising worker always trusting in God’s promises. In the end he succeeds, less because of his own efforts than because of the blessing of the God of his father. This expression *God of his father* should be noted (31:5, 42, 53). It was customary with the Amorites (as were Jacob and Abraham) for the chief of the clan to attach himself to the “God of his father,” the one his father had chosen to protect his family.

### Jacob's two marriages

<sup>15</sup> Laban said to Jacob, "Even if you are my kinsman, should you work for me for nothing? Tell me, what wages do you want?"

<sup>16</sup> Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the older one was Leah and the name of the younger was Rachel. <sup>17</sup> Leah's eyes were weak but Rachel had a lovely figure and was beautiful. <sup>18</sup> Jacob had fallen in love with Rachel and he said, "I will work for you for seven years in return for your younger daughter, Rachel." <sup>19</sup> Laban said, "It is better for me to give her to you than to any other man; stay with me."

Hos  
12:13

<sup>20</sup> To win Rachel, Jacob worked for seven years which seemed to him only a few days, because he loved her so much. <sup>21</sup> Jacob then said to Laban, "Give me my wife, for I have served my time and I want to lie with her." <sup>22</sup> So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and gave a feast. <sup>23</sup> But when night came he took his daughter Leah and gave her to Jacob and he lay with her. <sup>24</sup> Laban gave his slave girl Zilpah to Leah to be her maid.

<sup>25</sup> When morning came, there was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, "What have you done to me? Haven't I worked with you for Rachel? Why have you deceived me?"

<sup>26</sup> Laban said, "It is not our custom to give the younger daughter before the firstborn. <sup>27</sup> As soon as the marriage week is over, I will give you my younger daughter as well, but you must work with me for another seven years. <sup>28</sup> Jacob agreed to this and when he completed the week with Leah, Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife.

Dt  
21:15

<sup>29</sup> Laban gave Rachel his slave girl, Bilhah, to be her maidservant. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob slept with Rachel as well, and he loved Rachel more than Leah. And he continued working for Laban another seven years.

### Jacob's children

• <sup>31</sup> As Yahweh saw that Leah was not loved, he let her have children; but Rachel was barren. <sup>32</sup> Leah gave birth to a child and named him Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has seen my affliction; my husband is sure to love me now." <sup>33</sup> She gave birth to another son and said, "Yahweh saw that I was neglected and has given me this son as well"; and she called him Simeon. <sup>34</sup> Again she gave birth to a son and said, "This time my husband will be united to me because I have borne him three sons." That is why he was

called Levi. <sup>35</sup> She again gave birth to a son and said: "This time I will *praise Yahweh*." That is why she named him Judah. After that she had no more children.

**30** <sup>1</sup> When Rachel saw that she bore Jacob no children, she became jealous of her sister, and so she said to Jacob, "Give me sons or I shall die." <sup>2</sup> Jacob became angry and said to her, "Is it my fault that God has deprived you of children?" <sup>3</sup> She then said, "Here is my servant Bilhah; sleep with her so that she may give birth on my knees; so the child will be mine." <sup>4</sup> And she gave Bilhah her servant as wife to Jacob. <sup>5</sup> She became pregnant and bore him a son. <sup>6</sup> Rachel then said, "God has done me justice! He has heard my prayer and given me a son. That is why she named him Dan. <sup>7</sup> Bilhah, Rachel's servant, bore a second son to Jacob. <sup>8</sup> And Rachel said, "I have had a mighty struggle with my sister and I have won!" And so she named her son Naphtali.

1S  
1:6

<sup>9</sup> When Leah saw that she had stopped having children, she took her servant, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob as a wife. <sup>10</sup> Zilpah gave birth to a son for Jacob. <sup>11</sup> Leah said "How fortunate!" and named him Gad. <sup>12</sup> Leah's servant bore a second son to Jacob. <sup>13</sup> Leah said, "How happy I am! Women will call me happy." So she named him Asher.

Pro  
31:28  
Lk  
1:25

<sup>14</sup> At the time of the wheat harvest, Reuben went out to 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." <sup>15</sup> But Leah replied, "Isn't it enough for you to have taken my husband? Now you want to take my son's mandrakes as well!" Rachel then said, "He will sleep with you tonight in return for your son's mandrakes."

Song  
7:12

<sup>16</sup> In the evening when Jacob came in from the fields Leah went to meet him and said, "You will sleep with me tonight for I have hired you with my son's mandrakes!" So he slept with her that night. <sup>17</sup> Yahweh heard Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son. <sup>18</sup> Leah said, "God has given me my reward because I gave my maidservant to my husband." She named the child Issachar.

<sup>19</sup> Leah bore another son to Jacob. <sup>20</sup> Then she said, "God has offered me a beautiful gift; this time my husband will honor me for I have given him six children." She named the child

• 31. We have already mentioned how ancient traditions explain by means of questionable etymology the meaning of personal names or places. Such is the case for the sons of Jacob: Reuben: "he saw my humiliation." Simeon: "he heard." Levi: "he will be attached." Judah: "I will

celebrate Yahweh." Dan: "he has given me justice." Naphtali: "I have fought." Gad: "happiness has come." Asher: "for my delight." Issachar: "he made a wager." Zebulun: "he has given me a beautiful gift." Joseph: "he has added," and later, Benjamin: "the son of my right."

Zebulun. <sup>21</sup> She later gave birth to a daughter and called her Dinah.

<sup>22</sup> Then Yahweh remembered Rachel and let her have a child. <sup>23</sup> She became pregnant and gave birth to a son. "Yahweh has taken away my shame," she said. <sup>24</sup> And she called the child Joseph saying, "May Yahweh give me another son."

#### Other legends

<sup>25</sup> After Rachel had given birth to Joseph, Jacob said to Laban, "Let me go, so that I may return to my homeland. <sup>26</sup> Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go, for you know how well I have served you." <sup>27</sup> Laban said, "If I have won your friendship... I have learned from signs that Yahweh has blessed me because of you." <sup>28</sup> He then added, "Say what you want for wages and I will pay you." <sup>29</sup> Jacob said, "You know how well I have served you and how your cattle have prospered with me. <sup>30</sup> For you had little when I came, but since I have been with you there has been a considerable increase and Yahweh has blessed you. But now, when am I to do something for my own household?" <sup>31</sup> Laban asked, "What shall I give you?"

Jacob replied, "You will give me nothing, but if you do for me what I ask, I will continue to pasture and look after your flock. <sup>32</sup> Today I shall go through your flock removing from it every black lamb, and the spotted and speckled among the goats; these shall be my wages. <sup>33</sup> My honesty will answer for me later, when you come to look into my wages. Any goat among my herd that is not spotted or speckled, any lamb found among the sheep in my possession that is not black will be counted as stolen." <sup>34</sup> Laban said, "Agreed, it will be as you say."

<sup>35</sup> That same day Laban put aside the he-goats that were streaked, every one that had white on it, and all the black sheep. These he handed over to his sons <sup>36</sup> and he put a distance of a three days' journey between himself and Jacob. So Jacob looked after the rest of Laban's flock.

<sup>37</sup> Jacob then gathered fresh branches of poplar, almond and plane. He peeled white streaks in them, letting the white of the stems be seen. <sup>38</sup> Then he placed the branches he had peeled in front of the channels of the watering troughs where the animals came to drink and where they could be clearly seen by the animals. And as they mated there in front of the branches when they came to drink, <sup>39</sup> the animals produced streaked, spotted and speckled young. <sup>40</sup> He put the sheep apart but made the rest face the streaked and dark colored animals that belonged to Laban. In this way he built up droves of his own and did not add them to Laban's flock. <sup>41</sup> When-

ever the stronger of the ewes were breeding, Jacob put the branches in the channels in front of the eyes of the ewes so that they would mate there among the branches. <sup>42</sup> But for the feebler ewes he did not put them there so that the feebler were for Laban and the more robust for Jacob. <sup>43</sup> In this way he became extremely rich with a great number of sheep, maidservants and menservants, camels and donkeys.

#### Jacob returns to his land

**31** <sup>1</sup> Jacob learned that the sons of Laban were saying, "Jacob has taken everything our father owned, and it is at our father's expense that he has accumulated this fortune." <sup>2</sup> Jacob understood from Laban's expression that his attitude towards him was no longer the same.

<sup>3</sup> Then Yahweh said to Jacob, "Go back to your homeland, the country of your kinsmen. I will be with you." <sup>4</sup> Jacob had Rachel and Leah called to the field where his flocks were. <sup>5</sup> There he said to them, "I see that your father no longer looks kindly on me, but the God of my father has been with me. <sup>6</sup> You yourselves know that I have served your father with all my strength. <sup>7</sup> But your father has not been straight with me, changing my wages ten times. But God has not allowed him to do me harm. <sup>8</sup> Whenever he said: 'The spotted ones will be your wages,' then all the ewes had spotted lambs. And whenever he said: 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the ewes produced streaked lambs.

<sup>9</sup> It is God who has taken your father's livestock in that way and has given it to me. <sup>10</sup> For, in the breeding season, when I was looking up, I saw in a dream that the rams mating with the ewes were streaked, spotted or speckled. <sup>11</sup> And the angel in the dream said to me: 'Jacob.' 'Here I am,' I replied. <sup>12</sup> He then said: 'Look up and see that all the rams mating with the ewes are streaked, spotted or speckled. I have seen all that Laban has done to you. <sup>13</sup> I am the God who appeared to you at Bethel where you anointed a pillar and vowed to me by oath. Now get ready, leave this country and return to the land of your birth.'

<sup>14</sup> Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Have we still any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? <sup>15</sup> Haven't we been regarded by him as foreigners since he has sold us, and well and truly used up our money? <sup>16</sup> Surely all the fortune that God has taken from our father belongs to us and to our children. So do then all that God has told you."

<sup>17</sup> So Jacob got ready and put his children and his wives on camels. <sup>18</sup> He also took with him all his livestock and all that he had accumulated (the livestock he had acquired at Paddan-aram) *to return to his father Isaac*

in the land of Canaan. <sup>19</sup>Rachel then took advantage of Laban. While he was shearing his sheep she stole her father's family gods.

<sup>20</sup>So Jacob tricked Laban in not letting him know he was running away. <sup>21</sup>He fled with all he had, and after crossing the river Euphrates he made for the hill country of Gilead.

<sup>22</sup>Three days later Laban heard that Jacob had fled. <sup>23</sup>Taking his brothers with him, he followed Jacob for seven days and caught up with him in the hill country of Gilead. <sup>24</sup>God appeared to Laban in a dream at night and said to him, "Be careful not to say anything – either good or bad – to Jacob." <sup>25</sup>Jacob had pitched his tent in the hill country of Gilead when Laban overtook him. Laban and his brothers also encamped on the hills of Gilead. <sup>26</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "What have you done, tricking me and carrying my daughters off like prisoners of war?"

<sup>27</sup>Why did you run away secretly and cheat me? Why didn't you tell me? I could have sent you off with joy and singing and the music of tambourine and harp. <sup>28</sup>You didn't even let me kiss my grandchildren and daughters goodbye. You have done a foolish thing <sup>29</sup>and I have power to harm you, but last night the God of your father warned me saying: 'Be careful not to say anything – good or evil – to Jacob.' <sup>30</sup>Now if you have gone off because you were planning to return to your father's house, why did you steal my gods?"

<sup>31</sup>Jacob replied to Laban, "It was because I was afraid you would take your daughters from me! <sup>32</sup>But whoever is found in possession of your gods will not live. In the presence of our relatives see for yourself if anything that belongs to you is here with me and, if so, take it." Now Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen the gods.

<sup>33</sup>Laban entered Jacob's tent, then Leah's and then the tent of the two maidservants, but he found nothing. When Laban came out of Leah's tent, he entered the tent of Rachel. <sup>34</sup>Rachel had taken the gods, but put them into the camel's saddle, and sat on them. Laban felt all about the tent but did not find them. <sup>35</sup>Rachel said to her father, "Do not be angry with me, my lord, if I do not stand in your presence, for I am having my period." So he searched but did not find the gods.

<sup>36</sup>Then Jacob became angry and rebuked Laban. "What is my crime?" he asked him. "What sin of mine makes you hound me down? <sup>37</sup>Now that you have searched through all my belongings, have you found anything that belongs to your household? If so, let it be seen here in the presence of your

family and mine and let them judge between the two of us. <sup>38</sup>During the twenty years I have been with you, your ewes and your she-goats have not miscarried and I haven't eaten any of the rams from your flocks. <sup>39</sup>I haven't brought you any animal torn by a wild beast. I suffered the loss and you demanded payment from me for whatever was stolen by day or night. <sup>40</sup>During the day I have been stifled by the heat and at night I have suffered from the cold, and sleep has left my eyes. <sup>41</sup>It's twenty years that I've been with you. I worked fourteen years for your two daughters and six years for your flocks, and ten times you have altered my wages. <sup>42</sup>If the God of my father Abraham and the Fearsome God of Isaac had not been with me, you would have sent me away empty-handed. But God has seen my hardship and the toil of my hands and last night he passed sentence."

<sup>43</sup>Laban answered and said to Jacob, "The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children, these sheep are my sheep and all that you see are mine. How can I harm today these daughters of mine or their children? <sup>44</sup>Come now, let us make a treaty, you and me, and let it be a witness between us."

<sup>45</sup>Jacob took a stone and set it up as a pillar. <sup>46</sup>He then said to his kinsmen, "Collect stones." So they gathered stones and piled them up, and they ate there by the pile. <sup>47</sup>Laban called it Jegar-sahadutha, and Jacob called it, Galeed. <sup>48</sup>Laban said, "This pile of stones is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed; <sup>49</sup>and it was also known as Mizpah because Laban had said, "May Yahweh *watch* between me and you when we are no longer in sight of each other. <sup>50</sup>If you harm my daughters or take other wives besides my daughters, even though no man is with us, remember that God is witness between you and me."

<sup>51</sup>Then Laban said to Jacob, "Here is the pile and the pillar which I have set between you and me. <sup>52</sup>This pile and this pillar will witness that I will not pass beyond this pile to harm you and that you will not pass beyond this pile and pillar to harm me. <sup>53</sup>May the God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us!" So Jacob swore by the Fearful God of his father Isaac. <sup>54</sup>Jacob also offered a sacrifice on the mountain and invited his brothers to the meal. After they had eaten, they spent the night there.

**32** • <sup>1</sup>Next morning Laban rose early and, after kissing his sons and daughters, he blessed them and left for home.

• **32.1** God's blessings are with the fugitive Jacob. He works untiringly and after twenty years he has two wives, many children and

countless possessions. It is at this time that he returns to his homeland and gets ready to face Esau, his brother and rival. *Jacob was full of*

<sup>2</sup>As for Jacob, he went on his way and met Angels of God. <sup>3</sup>On seeing them Jacob exclaimed, "This is *God's camp*," and he named the place Mahanaim. <sup>4</sup>And going on his way, he sent messengers ahead of him to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom.

### Jacob's struggle with God

<sup>5</sup>Jacob sent Esau this message, "I have been staying with Laban until now. I have oxen, asses, flocks, men-servants and maidservants. I have sent to tell you this, my lord, that you may receive me kindly."

<sup>6</sup>The messenger returned and said to Jacob, "We went to your brother Esau and he is already coming to meet you with four hundred men."

<sup>7</sup>Jacob was full of fear and distressed. He then divided the people with him and the flocks, the herds and camels into two camps, <sup>8</sup>thinking, "If Esau attacks one camp, the other will escape."

<sup>9</sup>And Jacob said, "God of my father Abraham and my father Isaac, Yahweh, who said to me: 'Return to your country, to your father's land, and I will make you prosper,' <sup>10</sup>I am unworthy of the kindness and faithfulness you have shown to me, for with only my staff I crossed the Jordan and now I have enough to form two companies. <sup>11</sup>Deliver me from the hands of my brother

Esau for I am afraid lest he come and kill us all, even the mothers and their children. <sup>12</sup>Yet it was you who said: I will be good to you and make your descendants like the sand on the seashore, so many that they cannot be counted." <sup>13</sup>So Jacob spent the night there.

Then he took what he had with him, a present for his brother Esau: <sup>14</sup>two hundred she-goats, and twenty he-goats, two hundred ewes and twenty rams, <sup>15</sup>thirty camels in milk and their calves, forty cows and ten bulls, twenty she-asses and ten male donkeys. <sup>16</sup>He put them in the care of his servants, each herd by itself, and said to his servants, "Go ahead of me and leave a space between each herd." <sup>17</sup>He instructed the leader, "When my brother Esau meets you and asks, 'To whom do you belong? And where are you going? Who is the owner of the animals you are driving?' <sup>18</sup>Then you shall say: They belong to your servant Jacob. It is a present he is sending to my lord Esau. He himself is coming along behind us!"

<sup>19</sup>Jacob ordered the second and third servants and all who were following the herds in the same way, "That is what you shall say to Esau when you meet him: <sup>20</sup>Your servant Jacob is following!" For he thought to himself, "I may pacify him with the present I sent ahead, so that when I meet him face to face, he may perhaps receive me kindly." <sup>21</sup>So the present went ahead of him, but he himself spent that night in the camp.

• <sup>22</sup>That same night Jacob got up and taking his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons, crossed the ford of the Jabbok. <sup>23</sup>He took them

Hos  
12:4

*fear and distressed.* In his anguish Jacob prays to God, precisely to remind him of his promise and his "faithfulness," that is to say, all that God has done for him and his fathers. God responds to him in his own mysterious way in the vision at night.

• <sup>22</sup>. *Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak.* It is a struggle between God and Jacob. God accepts defeat and confirms his blessing on Jacob.

Occasionally we discover ourselves better in sleep than when we are awake. This is what happens with Jacob in his night struggle with God. He understands that his labors and trials have been more than a confrontation with society and men; they have been a wrestling with God. God promises success but will not grant it until Jacob exhausts all his strength.

Because Jacob understands better the reason for so many trials and delays, he personally addresses the one who blocks his way and who,

alone, can change Esau's disposition. Jacob becomes strong against God; he does not ask for a favor, a little help, but instead he demands that he keep his promises: *I will not let you go until you have given me your blessing.*

Jacob's prayer does not show the resigned attitude characteristic of a believer, according to some. Praying does not consist only in accepting God's will as a thing written in advance in heaven, or in asking for the strength to accept it: praying consists also in putting pressure on God, confident in his promises and knowing that he listens to us. If we could not have some part in the divine decisions concerning us and the governing of the world, the Covenant would be a fraud.

At the crossroads of life, pressed between the possibilities of becoming stagnant or surpassing himself, the believer knows that God will bring him beyond himself if he asks for it with faith.

*He dislocated his hip.* Jacob faces God when, after a long exile, he wants to force his entrance into the Promised Land. In fact, to enter this

and sent them across the stream and likewise everything he had. <sup>24</sup> And Jacob was left alone.

Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak. <sup>25</sup> When the man saw that he could not get the better of Jacob, he struck him in the socket of his hip and dislocated it as he wrestled with him.

<sup>26</sup> The man said, "Let me go, for day is breaking." But Jacob said, "I will not let you go until you have given me your blessing." <sup>27</sup> The man then said, "What is your name?" "Jacob" was the reply. <sup>28</sup> He answered, "You will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have been *strong-with-God* as you have been with men and have prevailed."

<sup>29</sup> Then Jacob asked him, "What is your name?" He answered, "Why do you ask my name?" And he blessed him there. <sup>30</sup> So Jacob called the place Penuel, saying, "I have seen *God face to face* and survived." <sup>31</sup> The sun rose as he passed through Penuel, limping because of his hip.

<sup>32</sup> That is why to this day the Israelites do not eat the sciatic nerve which is in the hip socket because the sciatic nerve in Jacob's hip had been touched.

### The meeting of Esau and Jacob

**33** <sup>1</sup> Jacob looked up and saw that Esau was coming with four hundred men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel and the two maid-servants. <sup>2</sup> He then put the maidser-

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

<sup>4</sup> Esau ran to meet him, took him in his arms, kissed him; and both wept. <sup>5</sup> Esau looked up and seeing the women and the children said, "Who are these with you?" Jacob replied, "They are the children God has given to your servant."

<sup>6</sup> Then the servants and their children went forward and bowed down. <sup>7</sup> Leah with her children likewise advanced and bowed, and lastly Joseph and Rachel went forward and bowed.

<sup>8</sup> Esau said, "What is the meaning of all this company I have met?" Jacob replied, "It is to win your favor." <sup>9</sup> Esau answered, "Brother, I have plenty; keep what you have for yourself." <sup>10</sup> Jacob said, "But, no, please! Accept the gift I offer, for I came to you as to God, and you received me kindly. <sup>11</sup> So accept the gift I have brought you, for God has dealt generously with me and I have plenty." And so much did Jacob insist that Esau accepted the gift.

<sup>12</sup> Esau then said, "Let us be on our way. I will lead you." <sup>13</sup> But Jacob said to him, "My lord knows that the children are not strong, and besides I must think of the ewes with lambs and the

Land is simply to enter into the mystery of God who wants to share his life with us, and this is impossible for the person who feels strong, sure of himself and of his own ways. Therefore, when we are about to enter, God tests us. Whatever blow, or misfortune or crisis we may be going through, it leaves us wounded and like strangers in this world. Jacob enters the Promised Land *with a limp* as Jesus also keeps the Land for those who weep, those who thirst for justice, those who are not violent.

Here again, as in many other ancient narratives of the Bible, modern discoveries throw fresh light on the text which allows us perhaps to have a different reading, apparently more earthy, and yet just as rich in a spiritual way. Recent excavations in this territory show us that the God of Penuel was responsible for putting people on the right road, and that his prophet

Balaam (see Num 23:25) made known his threats. In fact the more ancient stories of Jacob lead us to believe that God had corrected him (Hos 12:4): the meaning of his name Ishrael was given: "corrected by God." But later this name changed to Israel, for in central Palestine people had difficulty in pronouncing the sound "sh" (see Jdg 12:6). The interpretation "strong against God" was much more satisfactory for national pride. It may be assumed that in the primitive tradition, when Jacob returned, proud of his wives, of his sons and of all he had acquired in a more or less honest way, God stopped him, threatened him and wounded him. He needed to be humbled to receive the blessings promised to his ancestors.

After Jacob's victory, events must be subject to God's plans. Esau does not oppose Jacob's return to the land of his ancestors.

cows that have calves and if they are driven too hard, even for one day, all the flocks will die. <sup>14</sup>Let it please my lord to go ahead of me while I move on slowly at the pace of the cattle I'm driving and that of the children, until I reach my lord at Seir." <sup>15</sup>Esau said, "At least let me leave with you some of my men." Jacob replied, "Why? All I want is to keep your friendship."

<sup>16</sup>So Esau returned that same day to Seir. <sup>17</sup>But Jacob left for Succoth. There he built a house for himself and shelters for his cattle. That is why the place was called Succoth.

<sup>18</sup>On his return from Paddan-aram, Jacob safely reached Shechem, a town in the land of Canaan, and encamped within sight of the town. <sup>19</sup>For one hundred pieces of silver he bought from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem, the plot of land where he had pitched his tent. <sup>20</sup>There he erected an altar and called it God – the God of Israel.

Jos  
24:32  
12:6

#### The rape of Dinah, daughter of Jacob

**34** <sup>1</sup>Now Dinah, Jacob's daughter by Leah, went out to visit the women of that place. <sup>2</sup>When Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, the prince of that country, saw her, he seized her, raped her and dishonored her. <sup>3</sup>He was attracted to Jacob's daughter Dinah and loved the girl and spoke to her affectionately.

Ex  
22:15  
Dt  
22:28

<sup>4</sup>Shechem said to his father Hamor, "Get me this girl to be my wife."

2S  
13:12

<sup>5</sup>Now Jacob heard how his daughter Dinah had been dishonored, but said nothing until his sons who were in the fields with his cattle came home. <sup>6</sup>Hamor, father of Shechem, went to speak with Jacob. <sup>7</sup>When Jacob's sons returned from the fields and heard what had happened, they were indignant and very angry that Shechem had committed what was a crime in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, something which should never be done.

<sup>8</sup>But Hamor spoke to them saying, "Shechem, my son, deeply loves your daughter; please give her to him to be his wife. <sup>9</sup>Let us intermarry; give us your daughters and take our daughters for yourselves. <sup>10</sup>You will settle with us and the land is there before you to live in it, travel through it and acquire property in it.

<sup>11</sup>Shechem spoke to the father and brothers of the girl, "Please forgive me and I give you whatever you ask of me. <sup>12</sup>Fix a price for the marriage and whatever gift you require.

Whatever you ask I will give but only let me have the girl as my wife."

<sup>13</sup>Jacob's sons gave a cunning answer to Shechem and Hamor because Shechem had defiled their sister: <sup>14</sup>"We cannot do such a thing – give our sister to an uncircumcised man – for that would be a disgrace for us. <sup>15</sup>Only on one condition would we consent – that you and every male become like us and be circumcised. <sup>16</sup>Then we will give you our daughters and take yours, live with you, and with you become one people. <sup>17</sup>But if you don't listen to us and be circumcised, we will take our daughter and go." <sup>18</sup>What they said pleased Hamor and Shechem, his son.

17:10

<sup>19</sup>Shechem lost no time in doing what was demanded for he was truly in love with Jacob's daughter, and he was the most honored in his father's family.

<sup>20</sup>So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the gate of their city and spoke to their fellow citizens, <sup>21</sup>"These men are peaceful. Let them settle here and move around freely. The land is vast enough for them. We shall marry their daughters and give our daughters in marriage to them. <sup>22</sup>But on one condition will these men agree to live with us and become one people with us, and that is, that every male be as they are and be circumcised. <sup>23</sup>If we agree with them, their flocks, their possessions, their cattle will be ours. Let's do what they ask and they will settle with us." <sup>24</sup>All those who went out to the gate of the city agreed with Hamor and Shechem and every male was circumcised.

<sup>25</sup>Three days later when they were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, taking their swords, entered and took the town by surprise <sup>26</sup>and slew Hamor and Shechem and all the males. They took Dinah from Shechem's house and went off.

<sup>27</sup>Jacob's sons attacked the wounded and plundered the city because their sister had been violated. <sup>28</sup>They took their flocks and their herds and their donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the fields, <sup>29</sup>all their wealth, all their women and children. They plundered all that was in their houses.

<sup>30</sup>Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me, making me hateful to the people of this land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I have only a few men and if the others unite against me and attack me, I shall be destroyed, myself and my household. <sup>31</sup>But their reply was, "Is it right for him to treat our sister as a prostitute?"

#### Jacob at Bethel

**35** <sup>1</sup>God said to Jacob, "Go up to Bethel and settle there. Build an altar there to

28:10



God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”<sup>2</sup> Jacob said to his family and to all those who were with him, “Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, purify yourselves and change your clothes.”<sup>3</sup> We will then go up to Bethel. There I will make an altar to God who helped me when I was in trouble and who was with me during my journey.”

<sup>4</sup> So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had as well as their earrings and Jacob hid them under the oak that was near Shechem.<sup>5</sup> They then left and a terror fell on all the surrounding towns with the result that no one followed in pursuit of them.

<sup>6</sup> When Jacob and all those with him came to Luz in Canaan – which is Bethel – <sup>7</sup> he built an altar there and called the place El-Bethel because it was there that God had shown himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.<sup>8</sup> At that time Rebekah’s nurse, Deborah, died and was buried below Bethel near the oak. That is why it was called the Oak of Tears.

<sup>9</sup> God appeared again to Jacob when he arrived from Paddan-aram and blessed him <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Your name is Jacob, but no longer will you be called Jacob, for Israel will be your name.” So he was called Israel.<sup>11</sup> Then God said to him, “Be fruitful and grow in number! A nation or rather a group of nations will come from you.”<sup>12</sup> The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you and to your descendants after you.”<sup>13</sup> Then God left him.

<sup>14</sup> Jacob set up a stone in the place where God had spoken to him and offered a libation on it and poured oil on it.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob called the place where God had spoken to him, Bethel.

• **35.1** One cannot live one’s faith in isolation; thus Jacob begins to form a community by first requiring that his people get rid of their idols. When they take this concrete and visible step, which is a great sacrifice for them, they become the first community capable of giving witness to the world, of faith in the one God.

• 22. We mentioned that the Bible preserves some memories of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, in legends (see 11:26). Outside of those three, it has been proven that the other names such as Reuben, Simeon, Judah... do not refer to real people. Wandering tribes had their own way of recording the events of the past. They created stories in which each tribe was represented by a person of the same name. So, for example, if twelve tribes had merged into a single people: they would express that by saying that 12 ancestors with the names of those tribes were the sons of only one father, Jacob-Israel! Moreover, as four of those tribes, those of Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah had formed a different group

<sup>16</sup> They moved on from Bethel and were still some distance from Ephrath when Rachel gave birth and the delivery was very difficult.<sup>17</sup> When she was in great pain the midwife said to her, “Courage! For now you will have another son.”<sup>18</sup> And as she breathed her last – for she was dying – she called him Benoni (which means: *son of my pain*), but his father named him Benjamin.<sup>19</sup> So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath – that is Bethlehem – <sup>20</sup> and Jacob placed a pillar over her tomb which marks the place of the tomb to this day.

<sup>21</sup> Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder.<sup>22</sup> While Israel was living in that region, it happened that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father’s concubine, and Israel heard of it.

### The twelve sons of Jacob

• *Jacob had twelve sons.*<sup>23</sup> *By Leah: Reuben, Jacob’s eldest son, then Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun.*<sup>24</sup> *The sons by Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.*<sup>25</sup> *The sons by Bilhah, Rachel’s slave girl: Dan and Naphtali.*

<sup>26</sup> *The sons by Zilpah, Leah’s slave girl: Gad and Asher. These were the sons born to Jacob in Paddan-aram.*<sup>27</sup> *Jacob came home to his father Isaac at Mamre or Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) where Abraham and Isaac had lived.*<sup>28</sup> *After living a hundred and eighty years*<sup>29</sup> *Isaac breathed his last and was gathered to his people at a good old age. His sons Esau and Jacob buried him.*

### Esau the father of the Edomites

**36**<sup>1</sup> These are the descendants of Esau that is, Edom. Esau married women of Canaan: <sup>2</sup> Adah, the daughter of Elon the Hittite, Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah,

from the tribes of Joseph and Benjamin, the members of the first group were considered to be the sons of Leah, one of Jacob’s wives and the others, sons of Jacob’s other wife, Rachel. Likewise the *sons of the slave girls* were the figures of second rate tribes: Naphtali, Zebulun...

The story in chapter 34 refers to a violent episode when the tribes of Simeon and Levi were in conflict with the people of Shechem. (Shechem is a city, not a person). We must interpret what is said of “Laban, the Aramean” (chapter 31) and of Judah and his sons (26:30 and 36:1) in a similar way.

This explains why, ever since ancient times, biblical experts have considered many things in the history of the patriarchs as symbolic.

Twelve tribes made up the people of Israel and they always wanted to remember this number which was considered sacred (see chapter 48). Jesus will later remember this ancient structure of the people of God when he establishes his church as the new people of God and chooses twelve apostles to lead it.

1S  
4:20Jer  
31:15  
Mic  
5:1  
Ru  
4:11  
Mt  
2:6  
18Ex  
20:3  
1S  
7:3  
Jos  
24Jdg  
2:5

32:28

17:1

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

<sup>6</sup>Esau, with his wives, his sons and daughters, all the members of his household, his livestock, all his cattle and all the goods he had acquired in the land of Canaan, left for the land of Seir far removed from his brother Jacob. <sup>7</sup>For they had acquired too much to live together. The land where they were living at that time could not support them both because of their cattle. <sup>8</sup>That is why Edom settled in the hilly country of Seir. Esau is Edom.

<sup>9</sup>These are the descendants of Esau, the father of Edom, in the mountainous region of Seir.

<sup>10</sup>These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz the son of Adah, Esau's wife, and Reuel the son of Basemath, Esau's wife.

<sup>11</sup>The sons of Eliphaz were: Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, Kenaz. <sup>12</sup>Eliphaz son of Esau had Timna for concubine and she bore him Amalek. These are the sons of Adah, Esau's wife.

<sup>13</sup>These are the sons of Reuel: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, Mizzah. These are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

<sup>14</sup>These are the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah son of Zibeon: she bore him Jeush, Jalam and Korah.

<sup>15</sup>These are the chiefs of the sons of Esau. The sons of Eliphaz, firstborn of Esau: chief Teman, chief Omar, chief Zepho, <sup>16</sup>chief Kenaz, chief Gatam, chief Amalek. These are the chiefs of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. These are the sons of Adah.

<sup>17</sup>And these are the sons of Reuel son of Esau: Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, Mizzah. These are the chiefs of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Basemath, Esau's wife.

<sup>18</sup>And these are the sons of Oholibamah, Esau's wife: chief Jeush, Jalam, Korah. These are the chiefs of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah.

<sup>19</sup>These are the sons of Esau. This is Edom and these are their chiefs.

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

<sup>29</sup>These are the chiefs of the Horites: chief Lotan, chief Shobal, chief Zibeon, chief Anah, <sup>30</sup>chief Dishon, chief Ezer, chief Dishan. These are the chiefs of the Horites according to their clans in the land of Seir.

<sup>31</sup>These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before an Israelite king reigned. <sup>32</sup>In Edom these reigned: Bela son of Beor; his city was called Dinhabah. <sup>33</sup>Bela died and Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him as king. <sup>34</sup>Jobab died and Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded. <sup>35</sup>Husham died and Hadad, son of Bedad succeeded; he defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, and his city was called Avith. <sup>36</sup>Hadad died and Samlah of Masrekah succeeded. <sup>37</sup>Samlah died and Shaul of Rehoboth-hannah succeeded. <sup>38</sup>Shaul died and Baalhanan son of Achbor succeeded. <sup>39</sup>Baalhanan died and Hadad succeeded; his city was called Paul; his wife's name was Mehetabel, daughter of Matred, from Mezahab.

<sup>40</sup>These are the names of the chiefs of Esau according to their clans and localities, by name: chiefs Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, <sup>41</sup>Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, <sup>42</sup>Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, <sup>43</sup>Magdiel, Iram. These are the chiefs of Edom according to their families and residence in the land that was theirs. (This is Esau, father of Edom).

### THIRD PART THE STORY OF JOSEPH

**37** <sup>1</sup>Jacob lived in the land where his father had settled, in the land of Canaan. <sup>2</sup>This is the history of Jacob's family.

#### Joseph and his brothers

• Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was shepherding the flock with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives. Joseph informed his father of the bad reputation they had. <sup>3</sup>Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other children, for he was the son of his old age and he had a coat with long sleeves made for him. <sup>4</sup>His brothers who saw that their father loved him more than he loved them, hated him and could no longer speak to him in a friendly way.

<sup>5</sup>Joseph had a dream which, when he told it to his brothers, made them hate him the more: <sup>6</sup>"Listen to the dream I had. <sup>7</sup>We were binding sheaves in the field when my sheaf rose and stood up and your sheaves gathered round and bowed down to my sheaf."

<sup>8</sup>His brothers said to him, "So you want to rule us or lord it over us!" They hated him even more because of his dreams and what he said.

<sup>9</sup>Joseph had another dream which

he told to his brothers, "I saw the sun, the moon and seven stars bowing down before me." <sup>10</sup>When he told this to his father and brothers his father rebuked him, "What is this dream of yours? Are all of us, myself, your mother and your brothers to bow to the ground before you?" <sup>11</sup>His brothers were jealous of him but his father kept in mind what he had said.

Dn  
7:28  
Lk  
2:19

#### Joseph sold by his brothers

• <sup>12</sup>His brothers had gone to pasture their father's flock at Shechem, <sup>13</sup>and Israel said to Joseph, "Your brothers are pasturing the flock at Shechem; come along, I'll send you to them." Joseph replied, "Here I am." <sup>14</sup>Then his father said, "Go and see if all is well with your brothers and with the flock; then come back and tell me." Jacob sent him from the valley of Hebron and Joseph arrived at Shechem.

<sup>15</sup>A man met him as he was wandering through the countryside and said to him, "What are you looking for?" <sup>16</sup>He replied, "I'm looking for my brothers, please tell me where they are pasturing the flock." <sup>17</sup>The man said, "They have gone from here, for I heard them say:

Song  
1:7

• **37.2** The story of Joseph begins here and continues until the end of Genesis as a kind of transition between the Patriarchs and the events of the Exodus which follow.

Joseph, next to the last of Jacob's sons, is shown as the most important of the twelve brothers. The dreams of the young Joseph tell us that what will happen to him will not be pure coincidence, but rather will serve God's plans: through him God will save the whole family from hunger.

The long, moving story of Joseph, sold by his brothers, and who later would become their savior is a work of art of competent writers at the time of Solomon, but it draws support from the more ancient traditions, and it is also inspired by Egyptian books. But were they aware of the fact that they were expressing the whole plan of redemption: God saves us through the trials of a just person persecuted by his brethren?

*Israel loved Joseph more than any of his*

*other children, for he was the son of his old age. The son most loved and also the most delicate. Among his crude and unscrupulous brothers, Joseph shows nobility: from his youth this child of shepherds reveals that a great future awaits him.*

Two of the twelve tribes stood out: the tribe of Judah and that of Joseph. See the commentary on Joshua 13 on this subject. That is why the traditions about the "patriarchs," or ancestors, mention especially these two sons of Jacob.

• 12. Envy in brothers reaches madness and crime. God lets the brothers follow opposite paths, some good, others evil but that does not mean that those who are "good" abandon and forget those following "evil" ways. Joseph will save his brothers.

This story invites us to recognize that trials bring us to a more spiritual life, which, in turn makes our family life and our life in society more fruitful.

Let's go to Dothan!" So Joseph went off after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

<sup>18</sup>They saw him in the distance and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. <sup>19</sup>They said to one another, "Here comes the specialist in dreams! <sup>20</sup>Now's the time! Let's kill him and throw him into a well. We'll say a wild animal devoured him. Then we'll see what his dreams were all about!" <sup>21</sup>But Reuben heard this and tried to save him from their hands <sup>22</sup>saying, "Let us not kill him; shed no blood! Throw him in this well in the wilderness, but do him no violence." This he said to save him from them and take him back to his father.

Jer  
11:19  
Mt  
27:1

<sup>23</sup>So as soon as Joseph arrived, they stripped him of his long-sleeved coat that he wore <sup>24</sup>and then took him and threw him in the well. Now the well was empty, without water.

Jer  
38:6

<sup>25</sup>They were sitting for a meal when they looked up and saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, their camels laden with spices, balm and myrrh, which they were taking down to Egypt. <sup>26</sup>Judah then said to his brothers, "What do we gain by killing our brother and hiding his blood? <sup>27</sup>Come! We'll sell him to the Ishmaelites and not lay our hands on him, for he is our brother and our own flesh!" His brothers agreed to this.

Zec  
11:12  
Mt  
26:15

<sup>28</sup>So when the Midianite merchants came along they pulled Joseph up and lifted him out of the well. For twenty pieces of silver they sold Joseph to the

Midianites, who took him with them to Egypt. <sup>29</sup>When Reuben went back to the well, Joseph was no longer there. He tore his clothes <sup>30</sup>and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy has disappeared, and what am I to do?"

<sup>31</sup>They then took Joseph's coat, killed a goat and dipped the coat in its blood. <sup>32</sup>They sent the long-sleeved coat and had it taken to their father, saying, "This we have found; see if it is your son's coat or not." <sup>33</sup>He recognized it and said, "It is my son's coat. Joseph has been attacked by a wild animal and torn to pieces." <sup>34</sup>Jacob then tore his garments, put on sackcloth and mourned his son for a long time. <sup>35</sup>All his sons and daughters came to comfort him but he refused to be consoled saying, "No, I shall go down to the land of Shadows, mourning for my son." Thus his father wept for him.

<sup>36</sup>Meanwhile the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and the commander of the guard.

**The story of Judah and Tamar**

**38** • <sup>1</sup>It happened at this time that Judah left his brothers and went to stay with an Adullamite by the name of Hirah. <sup>2</sup>There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite called Shua. He married her <sup>3</sup>and she gave birth to a son whom he called Er. <sup>4</sup>She had another child and called him Onan. <sup>5</sup>And then she had a third child whom she called Shelah. She was at Chezib when she gave birth to him.

Num  
26:19

<sup>6</sup>Judah got a wife for Er, his firstborn son. Her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup>But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in Yahweh's sight and the Lord took his life. <sup>8</sup>Then Judah said to Onan,

• **38.1** Placed here, quite artificially, is an episode relating to Judah which interrupts the story of Joseph. We must not forget that two of the twelve tribes were to dominate the others: the tribes of Judah and Joseph. Ancient traditions rarely mention other than these two tribes.

During this age of primitive customs and morality, the Bible does not insist on certain aspects of sexual morality. What is important is the transmission of promises made to Jacob which are to benefit the descendants of Judah (Gen 49:10).

Onan's sin consists in having refused to father a son who, later, would not belong to him (see Ru

3:12 about the obligation to give a child to the widow of one's brother).

Tamar's nobility lies in her determination, by all means, to have a son who would bear the name of her first husband, Er, and who would, therefore be Judah's heir. It is rare for women to figure in the Bible, but when they do appear, it is often to give men a lesson in being human. Here, after the event by which Tamar enters into his life, Judah begins to reflect something new for him.

Tamar appears in the list of the ancestors of Jesus (Mt 1:3).

“Lie with your brother’s widow and fulfill the duties of a brother-in-law; the child to be born will be the heir of your brother.”<sup>9</sup> But Onan knew the child would not be his, so whenever he slept with his brother’s widow, he spilled the semen on the ground lest he give an heir to his brother.<sup>10</sup> What he did was displeasing to Yahweh who took his life as well.<sup>11</sup> Then

<sup>Ru 1:11</sup> Judah said to his daughter-in-law, “Live as a widow in your father’s house until Shelah, my son has grown up,” for he was afraid that Shelah, like his brothers, might die. So Tamar went and lived in her father’s house.

<sup>12</sup> After a long time, the wife of Judah, Shua’s daughter died. When Judah became consoled, he went up to Timnah to his sheep-shearers with his friend Hirah, the Adullamite.<sup>13</sup> It happened that Tamar was told, “Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.”<sup>14</sup> She at once took off her widow’s clothes, wrapped herself in a veil and sat down at the entrance to Enaim which is on the road to Timnah, for she knew that Shelah was a grown man and had not been given to her in marriage.

<sup>15</sup> Judah saw her and as her face was veiled he took her for a prostitute.<sup>16</sup> He went over to her on the roadside and said, “Allow me to sleep with you,” for he didn’t know she was his daughter-in-law. She asked, “What will you give me to sleep with you?”<sup>17</sup> He said, “I will send you a kid from my flock.” She replied, “Will you give me a pledge till you send it?”<sup>18</sup> “What pledge shall I give you?” he asked. She answered, “Give me your seal, your cord and the staff in your hand.” So he gave them to her and slept with her;<sup>19</sup> then she rose and left him and, taking off her veil, she put on her widow’s clothes. And she became pregnant.

<sup>20</sup> When Judah sent the kid by his friend, the Adullamite, to recover the pledge from the woman, he did not find her.<sup>21</sup> So he questioned the local people, “Where is the prostitute who was by the road at Enaim?” “There has been no prostitute there,” they said.<sup>22</sup> He returned to Judah and said, “I didn’t find her and even the local people said that there was no prostitute there.”<sup>23</sup> Judah then said, “Let her keep it all for herself lest the people finally laugh at us. At least I sent her the kid even if you didn’t find her.”

<sup>24</sup> About three months later Judah was told, “Tamar, your daughter-in-law played the prostitute and moreover she is now with child.” Judah said, “Bring her out and let her be burned.”<sup>25</sup> As they were bringing her out

she sent word to her father-in-law, “I have become pregnant by the man who owns these things. Find out to whom this seal, cord and staff belong!”<sup>26</sup> Judah acknowledged them and said, “She is more righteous than I am since I wouldn’t give her to my son Shelah.” And he had no further intercourse with her.

<sup>27</sup> When the time came for her to give birth, there were twins in her womb.<sup>28</sup> And when she was giving birth, one of them put out his hand and the midwife tied a scarlet thread around his wrist saying, “This one is the firstborn.”<sup>29</sup> But he withdrew his hand and his brother came out first and she said, “What a rift you have made for yourself!” And he was called Perez.<sup>30</sup> Then his brother with the scarlet thread on his wrist came out and he was given the name Zerah.

**39** • <sup>1</sup> Now Joseph was taken down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, commander of the guard, an Egyptian, bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him there.<sup>2</sup> Yahweh blessed Joseph while he lived in the house of his master, the Egyptian, and everything went right for him.

<sup>3</sup> The Egyptian could see that God was with him and everything worked well for him.<sup>4</sup> So Joseph pleased his master who made him overseer of his house and of all that he owned,<sup>5</sup> and from that time God blessed the Egyptian’s house because of Joseph; he blessed all that the Egyptian owned, his household and his land.<sup>6</sup> The Egyptian left all he had to the care of Joseph and, with Joseph fully in charge, he concerned himself with nothing except the food that he ate.

Now Joseph was a handsome man and well-built.<sup>7</sup> After some time his master’s wife kept noticing him and said, “Sleep with me.”<sup>8</sup> But he refused and said to her, “With me in charge, my master has no concern about anything in the house and has entrusted to me all that he has.<sup>9</sup> He is no more master in this house than I am and he refuses me

• **39.1** After his misfortune Joseph behaves as a model of honesty, faithfulness and perseverance. In the Bible, he is the first of the humiliated, just ones who look to God for their reward.

In the Bible there were many liberators and saviors before the coming of the Son of God, the

Savior. They were all tested before succeeding and many were despised by their people.

The story about Joseph and Potiphar’s wife is a lesson in genuine manliness. The Bible views faithfulness and respect for marriage as one of the virtues of authentic persons.

Ru  
4:12  
Mt  
1:3

26:3  
1S  
18:14  
Ps  
1:3

1S  
16:12

Pro  
7:10  
Ecl  
7:26

nothing, except yourself, of course, because you are his wife. How then could I do such an evil thing and sin against God?" <sup>10</sup>Now, although day after day she spoke to Joseph, he would not agree to sleep with her or give himself to her.

<sup>11</sup>It happened that one day, when he entered the house to attend to his duties, none of the servants were in the house. <sup>12</sup>Then Potiphar's wife caught hold of Joseph by his cloak saying, "Come to bed with me." But Joseph left his cloak in her hands and ran out of the house. <sup>13</sup>As soon as he had run out of the house, <sup>14</sup>she called her servants and said, "Look, a Hebrew has been brought here to make fun of us; he came here to lie with me; so I screamed <sup>15</sup>and when he heard me scream he left his cloak with me and ran out of the house." <sup>16</sup>Then she kept the cloak by her until the master came home. <sup>17</sup>She then told her story, "That Hebrew slave of yours came to make sport of me, <sup>18</sup>but when I screamed he left his cloak with me and ran out of the house."

<sup>19</sup>When his master heard what his wife told him, "This is how your servant treated me," he blazed with anger. <sup>20</sup>He took Joseph and put him in the Royal Prison where the king's prisoners were kept. But while Joseph was in prison <sup>21</sup>Yahweh was with him and showed him kindness so that he was well-liked by the warden of the prison. <sup>22</sup>The warden put him in charge of all the prisoners and made him responsible for all that was done there. <sup>23</sup>The warden did not interfere with anything that was under Joseph's care, because Yahweh was with him and gave him success in everything he did.

Ps  
106:  
46

39:5

### Joseph interprets the dreams

**40** <sup>1</sup>Some time after this it happened that the cupbearer of the king of Egypt, who prepared the drinks for Pharaoh, and his chief baker offended their lord. <sup>2</sup>Pharaoh was angry with his two officers <sup>3</sup>and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was kept. <sup>4</sup>So the captain of the guard appointed Joseph to attend to their needs, for they were under arrest for some time.

<sup>5</sup>One night both of them dreamed, each one his own dream, and each dream had its own meaning. As the two officers were with Joseph in custody in his master's house, <sup>6</sup>when Joseph came to them the next morning, he saw that they were troubled. <sup>7</sup>So he questioned them, "Why do you look sad today?" <sup>8</sup>They answered, "Both of us have had a dream, but there is no one to interpret them." Then Joseph said to them, "Is it not God who interprets dreams? Tell me what they were."

Dn  
2:27

<sup>9</sup>Then the chief cupbearer told Joseph what his dream had been. "In my dream there was a vine in front of me <sup>10</sup>and on the vine there were three branches. As it grew and flowered, its clusters ripened into grapes. <sup>11</sup>Pharaoh's cup was in my hand and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in his hand."

<sup>12</sup>Joseph said to him, "Here's the interpretation: the three branches are three days. <sup>13</sup>Within three days Pharaoh will release you and restore you to your office and you will place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as before when you were his cupbearer. <sup>14</sup>But when things go well with you, remember me and be kind enough to speak my name to Pharaoh and get me out of this place, <sup>15</sup>for I was, in fact, kidnapped from the land of the Hebrews and even here I have done nothing to deserve imprisonment."

<sup>16</sup>The chief baker, seeing that the interpretation was favorable, said to Joseph, "In my dream I had on my head three baskets of cakes. <sup>17</sup>In the top basket there were all kinds of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it from the basket above my head." <sup>18</sup>Joseph said, "The three baskets are three days, <sup>19</sup>and before three days have passed Pharaoh will take off your head and hang you on a tree and the birds will eat your flesh."

<sup>20</sup>It so happened that on the third day, Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his officers and remembered the chief cupbearer

• **41.1** These dreams and the events accompanying them give us a vivid picture of the situation in Egypt with rains, irrigation and droughts. Hebrew tradition credits Joseph with organizing the storage of surplus grain in Egypt in anticipation of the drought. Joseph's faithful-

ness and the fact that God never failed him are emphasized. In those days, believers knew little of the beyond which is why it was important for them to show how the just Joseph was rewarded for his perseverance in this life.

and the chief baker. <sup>21</sup>The cupbearer was restored to his office and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand; <sup>22</sup>but the chief baker was hanged, as Joseph had interpreted to them.

Ecl  
9:15  
Lm  
3:26

<sup>23</sup>Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

### The dreams of Pharaoh

**41** • <sup>1</sup>After two whole years Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile <sup>2</sup>when seven cows, sleek and fat, were coming up from the Nile and beginning to feed among the rushes. <sup>3</sup>Behind them came seven other cows, lean and scraggy that stood beside the cows already there. <sup>4</sup>These devoured the sleek and fat cows. Then Pharaoh awoke.

<sup>5</sup>He fell asleep again and had a second dream. He saw growing on one stalk seven ears of corn that were full and ripe. <sup>6</sup>And after these, there sprouted seven more ears of corn that were small and scorched by the east wind. <sup>7</sup>Now the small ears of corn swallowed the plump and ripe ones. Then Pharaoh awoke.

<sup>8</sup>In the morning he was uneasy and called all the magicians and wise men in Egypt. He told his dreams to them but not one among them was able to interpret his dreams. <sup>9</sup>Then the chief cupbearer spoke to Pharaoh, "This reminds me of my wrongs. <sup>10</sup>Pharaoh was angry with his servants and had me put in custody in the house of the captain of the guard and with me the chief baker. <sup>11</sup>Once on the same night we both had a dream, each with its own meaning. <sup>12</sup>With us was a young Hebrew, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him our dreams he interpreted them giving to each one its own meaning. <sup>13</sup>What he interpreted for us happened. I was restored to my office and the chief baker was hanged."

<sup>14</sup>Pharaoh then had Joseph summoned. They took him quickly from the prison, shaved him, changed his clothes and he presented himself to Pharaoh. <sup>15</sup>Then Pharaoh addressed

him, "I have had a dream which no one can explain; now I have heard that when you hear a dream you are able to interpret it." <sup>16</sup>Joseph replied, "It's not I but God who will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." <sup>17</sup>Pharaoh then began telling his dream.

Dn  
2:27  
Ex  
7:11  
8:1

"I was beside the Nile <sup>18</sup>when seven fine cows, sleek and fat, came up from the river and began to feed in the rushes. <sup>19</sup>Then seven other cows came up behind them. These were poor, scraggy and lean. I had never seen any so ugly in all the land of Egypt. <sup>20</sup>The thin, gaunt cows ate up the seven fat cows, <sup>21</sup>but after eating them, it was as if they had not eaten them at all because they remained as lean and scraggy as they were before. And then I woke. <sup>22</sup>I also saw in my dream seven ears of corn growing on one stalk, full and ripe. <sup>23</sup>Then, after them, there sprouted seven ears of corn that were hard and small and withered by the east wind. <sup>24</sup>The withered ears of corn swallowed the good ears. I told this to the magicians but none of them could explain its meaning."

<sup>25</sup>Then Joseph said, "Pharaoh's dream is one and the same. Yahweh has just revealed to Pharaoh what he will do. <sup>26</sup>The seven fat cows are seven years and the seven good ears as well. It's one dream! <sup>27</sup>The seven lean cows coming after them are seven years as are the seven withered ears of corn scorched by the east wind, and they are seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup>As I said to Pharaoh, God is revealing to him what he is about to do. <sup>29</sup>There will be seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt, <sup>30</sup>but they will be followed by seven years of famine. Then the time of abundance will be forgotten and famine will exhaust the land. <sup>31</sup>So severe will the famine be that no one will remember the time of plenty.

<sup>32</sup>If the dream has been repeated twice for Pharaoh it is because God has so determined and will soon make it happen. <sup>33</sup>Now it is for Pharaoh to choose an intelligent and wise man and set him over the land of Egypt. <sup>34</sup>Pharaoh could have supervisors in the land and could levy a tax of one fifth of the produce of the land during the seven

Dt  
1:13  
Acts  
6:3

years of plenty. <sup>35</sup> They must gather all the food of these productive years that are coming and, by the authority of Pharaoh, store grain for food in the towns and keep it. <sup>36</sup> This food will be a reserve for the seven years of famine coming to the land of Egypt so that the people will not die of hunger.”

#### Joseph, the head minister

<sup>37</sup> The proposal of Joseph pleased Pharaoh and his ministers, and Pharaoh asked them, <sup>38</sup> “Where shall we find such a man possessed with the spirit of God?” <sup>39</sup> And to Joseph he said, “Since it is to you that God has made known all this, there can be no one as intelligent and wise as you. <sup>40</sup> You shall be over my house, and all my people will obey your orders. Only I myself will be greater than you.”

<sup>41</sup> So Pharaoh said to Joseph, “See, I have put you in charge of the whole land of Egypt.” <sup>42</sup> He then took the signet ring from his finger and put it on Joseph’s finger. He clothed him in fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. <sup>43</sup> He had him ride in the chariot that was second only to his and they cried out before him, “Make way.” Thus he was put in charge of the whole land of Egypt.

Es  
8:2  
Dn  
5:29  
Lk  
15:22

<sup>44</sup> Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I am Pharaoh! Without your consent no one is to raise hand or foot in the whole land of Egypt.” <sup>45</sup> Pharaoh named Joseph Zaphenath-paneah and gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. After that Joseph traveled throughout the land of Egypt. <sup>46</sup> Joseph was thirty years old when he was summoned to the presence of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. After taking his leave of Pharaoh he journeyed through the entire land of Egypt.

<sup>47</sup> During the seven years of plenty

the land produced abundantly. <sup>48</sup> So Joseph gathered up all the food that was produced during these years, storing in each town the food from the fields around it. <sup>49</sup> Joseph stored huge quantities of wheat, like the sand from the sea, so much that they lost count of the amount.

<sup>50</sup> Before the years of famine came, Asenath, Joseph’s wife, had two sons. <sup>51</sup> Joseph called the first Manasseh, for he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” <sup>52</sup> He called the second by the name of Ephraim, for he said, “God has given me children in the land of my sorrow.”

<sup>53</sup> When the seven years of plenty throughout the land of Egypt came to an end, <sup>54</sup> the seven years of famine began as Joseph had foretold. There was famine in all the countries but bread was to be had in every part of Egypt. <sup>55</sup> When the land of Egypt began to suffer from the famine, the people came to Pharaoh for bread. But Pharaoh told all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph and do as he tells you.” <sup>56</sup> When the famine had spread throughout the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold grain to the Egyptians for the famine was indeed severe over the land. <sup>57</sup> As the famine had worsened throughout the whole world, people came from other countries to buy grain from Joseph.

Jn  
2:5

#### The sons of Jacob go down to Egypt

**42** • <sup>1</sup> When Jacob heard there was wheat in Egypt he said to his sons, “Why do you stand looking at one another? <sup>2</sup> I’ve heard there is grain in Egypt, so go down and buy some for us so that we may stay alive and not die!” <sup>3</sup> Joseph’s brothers – ten of them – went down to Egypt to buy wheat <sup>4</sup> but Jacob

• **42.1** This is the beginning of the long story of Joseph’s meeting with his brothers.

Note how Joseph, the savior, forces his brothers to atone for the crime they had committed.

One of them must sacrifice himself before his brother Joseph will reveal who he is. Forgiveness does not cancel out the necessity of making amends for the evil we have done.



did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, for he said, "Something might happen to him."

<sup>5</sup>So the sons of Israel were among those going to buy grain, for there was famine in Canaan. <sup>6</sup>It was Joseph, as governor of the land, who sold the grain to all the people. When his brothers arrived they bowed before him, with their faces to the ground. <sup>7</sup>Joseph recognized his brothers but did not make himself known and, instead, said harshly to them, "Where do you come from?" And they answered, "We come from the land of Canaan to buy grain for food."

<sup>8</sup>Joseph recognized his brothers but they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup>And he remembered the dreams he once had concerning them. He told them, "You are spies, and it is to discover the weak points of the land that you have come." <sup>10</sup>They said, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy grain for food. <sup>11</sup>We are all sons of the same man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies." <sup>12</sup>Joseph replied, "No, it is to find out the weak points of the country that you have come." <sup>13</sup>They said, "Your servants are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; the youngest is today with our father and the other is no more." <sup>14</sup>But Joseph insisted, "It's just as I said, you are spies! <sup>15</sup>And this will be proved. By the life of Pharaoh you will not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here. <sup>16</sup>One of you is to go and fetch your brother. The others will be imprisoned while I verify whether you are telling the truth. If not, then as true as Pharaoh lives, you are spies." <sup>17</sup>And so he put them all in prison for three days.

<sup>18</sup>On the third day Joseph said to them, "I will help you to save yourselves, for I am a man who fears God. <sup>19</sup>If you are sincere, let one of your brothers remain prisoner in the house of the guard where you now are, and

the rest of you take the grain to save your families from famine. <sup>20</sup>Then you will bring back your youngest brother; so the truth of what you say will be proved and your lives spared." They did as they were ordered <sup>21</sup>and said among themselves, "Alas! We are guilty because of the way we treated our brother when he pleaded with us for mercy, but we didn't listen. That is why this trouble has come upon us."

<sup>22</sup>Reuben answered them, "Didn't I tell you not to sin against the boy. But you did not listen and now we are brought to account for his blood." <sup>23</sup>Now they did not know that Joseph understood them as there was an interpreter between them. <sup>24</sup>As for Joseph, he withdrew and wept. When he came back, he spoke to them and took Simeon and had him bound and put in prison while they looked on.

<sup>25</sup>Joseph ordered their sacks to be filled with wheat and their money replaced in the sack of each one and provisions be given them for the journey. All this was done; <sup>26</sup>they loaded the grain on their donkeys and set off. <sup>27</sup>But in the evening one of them emptied his sack to feed his donkey at the lodging place, and he saw his money at the mouth of the sack, so he said, <sup>28</sup>"My money has been put back: here it is in my sack;" Their hearts failed them and they trembled and turned to each other and said, "What is this that God has done to us!"

<sup>29</sup>When they came back to Jacob in the land of Canaan, they told him about all their adventures:

<sup>30</sup>"The man who is governor of the country spoke harshly to us and treated us as spies, <sup>31</sup>but we said: 'We are honest men, not spies. <sup>32</sup>We were twelve brothers, sons of the same father; one is no more and the youngest is with our father in the land of Canaan.' <sup>33</sup>Then the man who is lord of the land said: By this I will know if you are honest. Leave one of your brothers here; take grain to save your families from the famine and go. <sup>34</sup>Bring back your youngest brother and let me see you are not spies

but honest men. Then I shall release your brother and you can trade in the land.”

<sup>35</sup> Now, when they emptied their sacks, each one found his money bag in his sack. When they saw this, they were afraid and their father as well. <sup>36</sup> Jacob their father said to them, “You are taking my children from me. Joseph has gone; Simeon has gone and now you are taking Benjamin. I have all this to bear!”

<sup>37</sup> Then Reuben said to his father, “You may have the lives of my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to me and I shall see that he comes back.” <sup>38</sup> But Jacob said, “My son will not go with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. If he were to meet with some misfortune on the way, you would send my gray head to the land of Shadows in sorrow.”

#### The second journey to Egypt

**43** • <sup>1</sup> Now the lack of food was severe in the land, <sup>2</sup> and when they had eaten the grain they brought from Egypt, their father said to them, “Go down again and buy us a little food.” <sup>3</sup> But Judah said to him, “The man solemnly warned us that our brother had to come with us. <sup>4</sup> If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you; <sup>5</sup> but if you don’t send him, we will not go, for the man said: You will not be admitted to my presence if your brother is not with you.” <sup>6</sup> Israel then said, “Why did you bring this misery on me by letting the man know you have another brother?” <sup>7</sup> They replied, “The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kinsfolk saying: ‘Is your father still alive? Have you another brother?’ And so we answered these questions. Could we have known that he would tell us to bring our brother?”

<sup>8</sup> Judah then said to Israel his father, “Send the boy with me. Let us go so that we, you and our children may live and not die. <sup>9</sup> I will guarantee his safety. If I do not bring him back and set him here before you, I will bear the blame forever. <sup>10</sup> If we hadn’t delayed for so long we could have been there and back twice over.”

<sup>11</sup> Israel their father said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some choice products of the land in your bags and a gift for the man – some balm, a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. <sup>12</sup> Take double the money with you and you will repay what was put in your sacks; it may have been a mistake. <sup>13</sup> Take your brother and go back to the man. <sup>14</sup> May God Almighty grant you mercy in his presence, so that he will allow you to bring back your other brother and Benjamin. As for myself if I am bereaved of my children, then bereaved I shall have to be.”

<sup>15</sup> The men took the gift and the double amount of money as well. And, taking Benjamin, they set off and went down to Egypt and were admitted to the presence of Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> When Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, he said to his steward, “Bring these men to my house. Have an animal slaughtered and a meal prepared, for these men will eat with me at noon.” <sup>17</sup> The steward did as Joseph directed and brought the men to Joseph’s house.

<sup>18</sup> They were afraid and said to each other, “It’s because of the money that was placed in our sacks the last time, that we are brought in. He wants to attack and overpower us and have us as slaves and take our donkeys.” <sup>19</sup> So they approached Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the door of the house,

• **43.1** We shall note in these chapters the soldering of two different traditions which gives rise to repetitions. Just as in chapter 37,

Reuben and Judah make the same effort to save Joseph, here Judah appears on the scene after Reuben.

<sup>20</sup>“Oh my Lord, we came down here the first time to buy food, <sup>21</sup>and when we reached a lodging place and opened our sacks, we found in the mouth of the sacks each one’s money to the full weight. We have brought it back with us <sup>22</sup>as well as additional money to buy food. We don’t know who put the money in our sacks.” <sup>23</sup>The steward said, “Be at peace! Don’t be afraid. Your God, the God of your father, put a treasure in your grain sacks. Your money reached me safely.” He then brought Simeon out to them.

<sup>24</sup>The steward took them into Joseph’s house, gave them water to wash their feet and fodder for their donkeys. <sup>25</sup>They prepared their present and waited for Joseph’s arrival at midday, for they heard they were to dine there.

<sup>26</sup>When Joseph came into the house, they offered him the gift they had with them and bowed to the ground before him. <sup>27</sup>He asked them how they were and said, “Is your father well, the old man you spoke about? Is he still alive?” <sup>28</sup>They answered, “Your servant our father is well and is still alive.” <sup>29</sup>He looked up and saw his brother Benjamin, the son of his own mother, and said, “Is this your youngest brother, the one you told me about?” And he added, “God be good to you, my son!” <sup>30</sup>So deeply moved was Joseph, on seeing his brother, that he wanted to cry and went out quickly and wept in his own private room. <sup>31</sup>After he had washed his face and come out, controlling himself, he said, “Serve the meal.” <sup>32</sup>He was served separately and so were they, and the Egyptians as well, for the Egyptians cannot share a meal with Hebrews; for the Egyptians this would be a shame. <sup>33</sup>They were seated opposite him in the order of their ages from the eldest to the youngest and they looked at each other in astonishment.

<sup>34</sup>Joseph had portions from his own dish taken to them and Benjamin’s portion was five times more than that of

the others. So they drank freely with him.

#### Joseph’s cup in Benjamin’s sack

**44** <sup>1</sup>Now Joseph gave this order to his steward, “Fill the men’s sacks with as much food as they can carry and put back each man’s silver in the mouth of his sack, <sup>2</sup>and put my cup, the silver cup with the money for the grain in the sack of the youngest.” The steward did as Joseph had directed.

<sup>3</sup>As soon as it was light next morning the men were sent away with their donkeys. <sup>4</sup>When they had gone but were still not far from the city, Joseph said to his steward, “Go quickly after those men and when you have caught up with them, say this: Why have you repaid good with evil? <sup>5</sup>Isn’t this the cup my master drinks from and uses for divination? You have done a wicked thing.”

<sup>6</sup>When he caught up with them he repeated these words. <sup>7</sup>They said to him, “Why does my lord speak like that? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing. <sup>8</sup>The money we found in the mouths of our sacks, we brought back to you from the land of Canaan! How then could we have stolen silver or gold from your lord’s house? <sup>9</sup>If one of your servants is found with the object, he will die and we too will become my lord’s slaves.” <sup>10</sup>“Very well then,” he said, “it will be as you say. The one who is found to have the cup will become my master’s slave; the rest of you will go free.” <sup>11</sup>Then each one quickly lowered his sack to the ground and opened it. <sup>12</sup>And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. <sup>13</sup>Then they tore their clothes and, reloading their donkeys, they returned to the city.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers returned and they threw themselves on the ground before him. <sup>15</sup>Joseph said to them,

“What have you done? Didn’t you know that a man such as I am is able to practice divination?”

<sup>16</sup>Then Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? How can we prove our innocence? God has uncovered your servant’s guilt; we are my lord’s slaves, we and the one who has been found with the cup.” <sup>17</sup>But Joseph said, “Far be it from me to do that. Only the man found to have the cup will be my slave. As for the rest, go back in peace to your father.”

<sup>18</sup>Judah then went forward and said, “My lord, allow your servant to speak. Do not be angry with your servant, although you are equal to Pharaoh himself. <sup>19</sup>The last time you questioned your servants saying: ‘Have you a father or a brother?’ <sup>20</sup>We said to my lord: ‘We have an aged father who had a child in his old age. His brother is dead and he is the only one left of his mother’s children. And his father loves him.’ <sup>21</sup>Then you said to us: ‘Bring him down so that I can see him for myself.’ <sup>22</sup>We told my lord that the boy could not leave his father, for if he did, his father would die.

<sup>23</sup>You then told us that if our youngest brother did not come with us, we would not be admitted to your presence. <sup>24</sup>All this we said to our father on returning there. <sup>25</sup>So when he told us to come back and buy a little food, <sup>26</sup>we said: ‘We cannot go down again unless our youngest brother is with us. We shall not be admitted to the lord’s presence unless our brother is with us.’ <sup>27</sup>Then my father said: ‘You know that my wife had two children. <sup>28</sup>One went away from me and has surely been torn to pieces since I have not seen him anymore. <sup>29</sup>If you take this one from me and something happens to him you will bring my gray hair in sorrow to the grave.’ <sup>30</sup>Now I can’t return to my father without the boy, for my father loves him very much. If he sees that the boy is not there, <sup>31</sup>he will die and we will have sent the gray hairs of our father in sorrow to the grave.

<sup>32</sup>Now I, your servant, guaranteed the boy’s safety and said to my father: ‘If I do not bring him back, I will bear the blame before you all my life.’ <sup>33</sup>So now

let me take the place of the boy and stay here as slave and let the boy go with his brothers, <sup>34</sup>for I can’t return to my father without the boy. Do not let me see the misery that would be too much for my father.”

#### Joseph reveals himself

**45** <sup>1</sup>Now Joseph could no longer control his feelings in the presence of all those standing by and he called out, “Leave my presence, everyone!” And only his brothers were with him when Joseph made himself known to them. <sup>2</sup>He wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard and the news spread through Pharaoh’s house.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” And his brothers could not answer because they were terrified at seeing him. <sup>4</sup>Joseph said, “Come closer,” and they drew nearer. “I am Joseph your brother, yes, it’s me, the one you sold to the Egyptians. <sup>5</sup>Now don’t grieve and reproach yourselves for selling me, because God has sent me before you to save your lives. <sup>6</sup>It’s two years since famine has been in the land and there will be another five years without tilling and without harvest. <sup>7</sup>God has sent me ahead of you to make our race survive there and to save many of you. <sup>8</sup>So it was not you but God who sent me here, and made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of his household, and ruler also of all the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup>Go back quickly to my father and say to him: ‘Joseph your son sends you this message: God has made me lord of all Egypt; so come down to me without delay; <sup>10</sup>you shall live in the land of Goshen and you shall be near me, you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and your herds, all that you have. <sup>11</sup>And there I will provide for you (for there will be five more years of famine) lest you and your household and all who belong to you, be in need. <sup>12</sup>Now you can see for yourselves, and your brother Benjamin

can see that it is I myself who speak to you. <sup>13</sup>You will tell my father of the glory I have in Egypt and of all that you have seen. Go quickly and bring my father down here.”

<sup>14</sup>Joseph then threw his arms around Benjamin and wept. <sup>15</sup>Then weeping he kissed and embraced his brothers and they began to talk with him.

<sup>16</sup>The news spread through Pharaoh's house, “Joseph's brothers are here,” and the news pleased both Pharaoh and his officials.

<sup>17</sup>Pharaoh told Joseph, “Let your brothers load their beasts, return to the land of Canaan <sup>18</sup>and bring their father and their families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will enjoy the fat of the land! <sup>19</sup>As for yourself give them this order: Take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives; get your father and come! <sup>20</sup>Never mind the things you leave there, for the best in all Egypt is yours!”

<sup>21</sup>The sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had ordered, and provisions for the journey. <sup>22</sup>To each one he gave a festal garment but to Benjamin he gave three hundred silver coins and five festal garments. <sup>23</sup>To his father he sent ten asses loaded with all the best goods in Egypt and ten donkeys loaded with grain, bread and provisions for his father on the journey. <sup>24</sup>Then he sent his brothers away and as they left he said, “Don't quarrel on the way.”

<sup>25</sup>They returned from Egypt and came back to Jacob their father in Canaan. <sup>26</sup>They told him, “Joseph is alive and he is the ruler of all Egypt!” Jacob was stunned for he could not believe them. <sup>27</sup>But they told him all that Joseph had said and showed him the wagons that Joseph sent to carry him. Then Jacob's spirit revived and he said, <sup>28</sup>“It's enough, my son Joseph is alive; I will go and see him before I die.”

#### Jacob goes down to Egypt

<sup>28:10</sup> **46** • <sup>1</sup>Israel left with all he owned and reached Beersheba where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup>God spoke to Israel in visions that he had during the night, “Jacob! Jacob!” “Here I am,” he said. <sup>3</sup>“I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. <sup>4</sup>I will go with you to Egypt and I will bring you back again and Joseph's hand will close your eyes.”

<sup>5</sup>Jacob left Beersheba and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father with their little children and their wives *in the wagons that Joseph had sent to fetch him*. <sup>6</sup>They also took their flocks and all that they had acquired in Canaan. And so it was that Jacob came to Egypt and with him all his family, <sup>7</sup>his sons and his grandsons, his daughters and his granddaughters, in short all his children he took with him to Egypt.

<sup>8</sup>Here are the names of the descendants of Israel who came to Egypt:

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, <sup>9</sup>and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. <sup>10</sup>the sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, whose mother was a Canaanite. <sup>11</sup>The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. <sup>12</sup>The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. <sup>13</sup>The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Job, and Shimron. <sup>14</sup>The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jah'leel <sup>15</sup>(these are the sons of Leah, Jacob's wife, who were born in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three). <sup>16</sup>The sons of Gad: Zip'ion, Haggai, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. <sup>17</sup>The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beri'ah: Heber and Malchiel. <sup>18</sup>These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and Jacob was their father – sixteen persons. <sup>19</sup>The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. <sup>20</sup>And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whose mother was Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, the priest of On. <sup>21</sup>And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard <sup>22</sup>(these are the sons of Rachel – fourteen). <sup>23</sup>The children of Dan: Hushim. <sup>24</sup>The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem <sup>25</sup>(these are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and Jacob was their father – seven persons in all).

<sup>26</sup>The total number of all the persons who came to Egypt with Jacob, all who were of his own blood, not counting the wives of his sons, was sixty-six. <sup>27</sup>With the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt, the total number of Jacob's household that came to Egypt was seventy.

#### Jacob meets Joseph

<sup>28</sup>Jacob sent Judah ahead to let Joseph

• **46.1** Here, the adventures of Joseph have important consequences: Jacob comes to Egypt with his entire family. The Hebrews settle in Egypt and seem to forget the land of Canaan through which Abraham and Jacob had traveled

with their flocks and which God had promised to them. They will remain in Egypt for several centuries until Moses leads them back to the land of promise. This long delay was part of God's plan.

Dt  
26:5  
Num  
20:15  
Is  
52:4  
Ex  
1:1

Ex  
1:5  
Dt  
10:22  
Acts  
7:14

know he was coming and that he would soon arrive in the land of Goshen.

<sup>29</sup> Joseph got his chariot ready in order to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself, threw his arms around his father and wept on his shoulder for a long time. <sup>30</sup> Israel said to Joseph, “Now I can die, for I have seen your face and know you are alive.”

<sup>31</sup> After that Joseph said to his brothers and all his father’s family, “I will go and give the news to Pharaoh and tell him that my brothers and my father’s family who were in the land of Canaan have come to me. <sup>32</sup> I will also tell him that you are shepherds, keeping livestock, and have brought your flocks and cattle and all your belongings. <sup>33</sup> So when Pharaoh summons you and says: ‘What is your occupation?’ <sup>34</sup> you will say: ‘Your servants keep flocks and herds; it has been so since our youth, and for our fathers before us.’ Then you will settle in the land of Goshen, for the Egyptians detest all shepherds.”

**47** <sup>1</sup> Joseph went and told Pharaoh, “My father and brothers with their sheep and cattle and all their possessions have come from the land of Canaan to Goshen.” <sup>2</sup> He then presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh. <sup>3</sup> Pharaoh asked, “What are your occupations?” and they replied, “Your servants are shepherds as were our fathers before us. <sup>4</sup> We have come to settle in the land for there is no more pasture for our sheep, so severe is the famine in the land of Canaan. And now we pray you, may we stay in the land of Goshen?” <sup>5</sup> Pharaoh then spoke to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. <sup>6</sup> The land of Egypt is before you; let your father and brothers settle in the best part; let them settle in Goshen, and if among them there are capable men, put them in charge of my cattle.”

**The sons of Jacob in Egypt**

<sup>7</sup> Joseph brought in Jacob his father and presented him to Pharaoh <sup>8</sup> who then asked him, “How old are you?” <sup>9</sup> Jacob replied, “The years of my wanderings are one hundred and thirty. Brief and difficult have been the years of my life, and not as many as those of my fathers.” <sup>10</sup> Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and withdrew from his presence.

<sup>11</sup> So Joseph had his father and brothers settled, giving them property in the best part of Egypt, in the land of Rameses as Pharaoh had commanded. <sup>12</sup> Joseph provided his father, his brothers and his father’s entire household with food according to the number of their dependents.

• <sup>13</sup> Now so severe was the famine that no bread was to be had in all the land. Both Egypt and Canaan were exhausted because of the famine. <sup>14</sup> Joseph then collected all the money that had been given to buy bread in the lands of Egypt and Canaan. All this money Joseph took to Pharaoh’s house.

<sup>15</sup> When all the money of the people of Egypt and Canaan was gone, all Egypt came to Joseph saying, “Give us bread! Why must we die before your eyes, for want of money?”

<sup>16</sup> Joseph told them, “Give me your cattle to pay for bread since you have no money.”

<sup>17</sup> So they brought their livestock and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for their horses, sheep and cattle and even their donkeys. In that way he supplied them with food for that year.

<sup>18</sup> The following year they came to him again and said, “We will not hide from our lord that all our money is gone and that our cattle now belong to you. All that is left to us are our persons and our land. <sup>19</sup> Why should we die while you look on, ourselves and our land? So buy us and our land for bread; we shall be in bondage to you and Pharaoh. Give us grain that we may live and not die and our land remain desolate.”

<sup>20</sup> So it was that Joseph acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; all the Egyptians sold their fields, so cruelly hard-pressed were they by the famine. Pharaoh became owner of the land <sup>21</sup> and Joseph reduced the people to servitude from one end of Egypt to the other. <sup>22</sup> Only the land of the priests he did not buy, because by a decree of Pharaoh they lived on what had been given to them by Pharaoh. For that reason they did not sell the land that belonged to them.

<sup>23</sup> Then Joseph said to the people, “Now that I have bought you and your land for Pharaoh, here is seed for you to sow the land. <sup>24</sup> At harvest time you will give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths will be yours for seed for sowing, for food for yourselves and your families.” <sup>25</sup> They said, “You have saved our lives. If it please my lord, we shall be Pharaoh’s serfs.” <sup>26</sup> So Joseph introduced a statute that remains to this day, whereby a fifth of the produce goes to Pharaoh. Only the land of the priests did not become Pharaoh’s.

<sup>27</sup> So Israel lived in Egypt in the land of Goshen. *They became owners of this land; they had many children and greatly increased in number.*

<sup>28</sup> Jacob lived for one hundred and forty-seven years, seventeen of them in the land of Egypt.

<sup>29</sup> When his life was drawing to a close he called for his son Joseph and said to him, “If

Lm  
1:11  
Ne  
5:3

47:28  
Job  
14:1  
Ps  
90:9  
Eph  
5:16

• **47.13** In Egypt, the land belonged to the Pharaoh: a very strict administration allowed him to require part of the crop from all the farmers. Here this administration is attributed to Joseph.

you wish to be faithful and kind to me, place your hand under my thigh and promise me that you will not bury me in Egypt! <sup>30</sup>But when I rest with my fathers, carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their tomb.” Joseph said, “I will do as you say.” <sup>31</sup>Jacob insisted, “Swear to it!” He swore to him and Israel fell back on his pillow.

### Jacob adopts Joseph’s children

**48** • <sup>1</sup>Some time later, when Joseph was told that his father was ill, he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. <sup>2</sup>So they told Jacob that Joseph his son had come. Then Israel, mustering his strength, sat up in bed.

<sup>3</sup>And he said to Joseph, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me <sup>4</sup>saying, ‘I will make you fruitful and increase your number, and I will make of you a group of nations, and I will give this land to you and to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.’ <sup>5</sup>From now on your two sons who were born in Egypt, before I came to you here, are mine! Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. <sup>6</sup>Only the children born after them will be yours and the land they inherit shall be known by the names of Ephraim and Manasseh. <sup>7</sup>When I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died on the journey at some distance from Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem.”

<sup>8</sup>When Israel saw Joseph’s sons he said, “Who are these?” <sup>9</sup>Joseph told his father, “They are the sons that God has given me here.” Jacob said, “Bring them to me that I may bless them.” <sup>10</sup>As Israel’s eyes were dim with age, he could no longer see. When Jacob brought them near, he kissed and embraced them, <sup>11</sup>and said to Joseph, “I didn’t expect to see you again and now God is letting me see your children as well!” <sup>12</sup>Joseph lifted them from Israel’s knees and he himself bowed low, his face to the ground.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph then took them both, Ephraim by his right hand to Israel’s left, and Manasseh by his left hand to Israel’s right. <sup>14</sup>Israel raised his right hand and placed it on Ephraim’s head, although he was the younger, and placed his left hand on Manasseh’s head even though Manasseh was

the firstborn. <sup>15</sup>Then he blessed Joseph and said, “May the God in whose presence my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day, <sup>16</sup>the Angel who has saved me from every evil, bless these boys. And in them may my name live on and that of my fathers Abraham and Isaac. And may they increase greatly on the earth!”

<sup>17</sup>Joseph was displeased when he saw his father had placed his right hand on Ephraim’s head. So he took his father’s hand from Ephraim’s head to place it on Manasseh <sup>18</sup>and said, “Not like that father, for this one is the elder. Place your right hand on his head.” <sup>19</sup>But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know; he too will be great and become a nation. Nevertheless his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations.”

<sup>20</sup>He blessed them that day in these words: “Through you Israel will bestow this blessing: May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!”

So he placed Ephraim ahead of Manasseh. <sup>21</sup>Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am going to die. God will be with you and he will bring you back to the land of your fathers. <sup>22</sup>And to you, over and above what goes to your brothers, I give a mountain slope that I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow.”

### The blessing of Jacob

**49** • <sup>1</sup>Jacob then called his sons and said,

<sup>2</sup>“Gather round, sons of Jacob. And listen to your father Israel!

<sup>3</sup>Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the firstfruits of my manhood! excelling in honor and excelling in power.

<sup>4</sup>Restless as water, you will excel no more for you went to your father’s wife, on to my bed and defiled it.

<sup>5</sup>Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are weapons of violence. <sup>6</sup>Let me not share their counsel! Let my heart keep far from their company, for in anger they killed men, and hamstringed oxen at their pleasure.

<sup>7</sup>A curse on their anger for it is fierce; a curse on their fury, so cruel! I will divide them among Jacob, and scatter them among Israel.

<sup>8</sup>Judah, your brothers will praise you!

• **48.1** The twelve tribes of Israel were actually thirteen, with the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, together, called the tribes of Joseph. This is how they arrived at the number twelve. The present chapter explains this: Ephraim and Manasseh will be considered as two sons of Jacob to replace Joseph. Jacob’s blessing, like the blessing of Isaac, his father, goes to the younger son and not to the elder. God favors

whom he wishes, and is not bound to regard the right of succession, or the parents’ wishes.

• **49.1** *Jacob’s blessings* do not go to his sons but to the twelve tribes bearing their names. The future destiny of these tribes will vary greatly. Jacob’s blessing is a way of saying that these destinies were known to God beforehand and that they were part of his plan of salvation

49:24  
Ps  
23:1  
80:2  
Ezk  
34:15

17:1  
Jdg  
1:23  
35:11

Heb  
11:21  
27:1

29:32  
35:22

34:25

Rev 5:5 You shall seize your enemies by the neck!  
Your father's sons shall bow before you.  
9 Judah, a young lion!

You return from the prey, my son!  
Like a lion he stoops and crouches,  
and like a lioness, who dares to rouse him?  
10 The scepter shall not be taken from

Num 24:17 Judah,  
Mic 5:1 nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,  
Is 9:5 until he comes to whom it belongs,  
and who has the obedience of the nations.

11 He ties his foal to a vine,  
and his ass' colt to the choicest branch.  
Zec 9:9 He washes his garments in wine  
Rev 7:14 and his robe in the juice of grapes.

12 His eyes shall be red with wine,  
and his teeth whiter than milk.

13 Zebulun lives by the seashore; he is a haven for the ships, and his flank stretches to Sidon.

14 Issachar is a sturdy ass, lolling beside the sheepfolds.

15 He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant. He bends his back to the burden and submits to forced labor.

2S 20:18 16 Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper on the path, that bites the horse's heels, making the rider fall backwards!

18 In your salvation, I hope, O Yahweh!

19 Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels.

20 Asher's food will be rich, and he will provide delicacies fit for a king!

21 Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns.

Dt 33:13 22 Joseph is a fruitful vine,  
a fruitful vine near a spring,  
whose branches climb over a wall.

23 Archers attacked him fiercely and sorely provoked him;

24 but his bow remained steady,  
and his arms nimble,

because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob;

because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel;

25 because of the God of your father, your Helper!

because of God Almighty who blesses you with blessings from heaven above,  
with blessings from the deep below!  
with blessings of the breast and the womb!

which benefits everyone, but does not give the same gift to everyone.

The two tribes of Judah and Joseph dominate. This ancient prophecy seems to say that Judah would live apart from others until the coming of "the one the people would obey." This text, however, has been corrupted and is doubtful.

Did they wish only to celebrate the coming of

26 The blessings of your father are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, the bounty of the everlasting hills! May they all rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the one who is a prince among his brothers!

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf!  
In the morning he devours his prey,  
and in the evening he divides the spoil!"

Jdg 20:21

**The death and funeral of Jacob**

28 These are all the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what his father said when he blessed them, *giving each one a special and appropriate blessing.* 29 He then gave them these instructions: "I am soon to be gathered to my people; bury me near my fathers, in the cave in the field of Ephron, the Hittite; 30 in the cave in the field of Machpelah, to the east of Mamre in Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place. 31 It was there that Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried. There they buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave in it were purchased from the Hittites."

23:19

33 When Jacob had given these instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed; he breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

**50** 1 Joseph threw himself on his father, wept over him and kissed him. 2 Then as Joseph had instructed them, his physicians embalmed Israel his father. 3 This took a full forty days, the length of time required for embalming. The Egyptians mourned him for seventy days.

4 When the days of mourning were over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's household, "If you wish to show me kindness, please let Pharaoh know 5 that when my father was dying he made me swear that I would bury him in the tomb he had made ready for himself in Canaan. Ask him to let me go up and bury my father. I will come back again." 6 Pharaoh said, "Go and bury your father as he made you swear to do."

7 Joseph went up to bury his father and with him went all Pharaoh's officials, the elders of his household and all the elders of Egypt, 8 as well as all belonging to the household of Joseph, his brothers and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks and herds were left in the land of Goshen. 9 With the chariots and horsemen that went

King David, or was it the announcement of a great destiny for the kingdom of Judah, or was it the expectation of a savior-king? Actually the kings of the people of God and Jesus after them were to come from this tribe. Judah here is considered as the heir of the promises made to Abraham and Jacob.



up with him it was a very imposing caravan. <sup>10</sup>When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they carried out a solemn and long lamentation and there Joseph mourned his father for seven days. <sup>11</sup>When the Canaanites witnessed this mourning they said, "This is a solemn mourning ceremony of the Egyptians." That is why this place which is east of the Jordan was called Abel Mizraim.

<sup>12</sup> *Jacob's sons did as he had ordered them.* <sup>13</sup> *They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre that Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial place.*

<sup>14</sup> After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all those who had gone up with him for the burial.

#### The last years of Joseph

• <sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was dead they said, "What if Joseph turns against us in hate because of the evil we did him?" <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph saying, "Before he died your father told us to say this to you: <sup>17</sup> Please forgive the crime and the sin of your brothers in doing

evil to you. Forgive the crime of the servants of your father's God." When he was given the message, Joseph wept. <sup>18</sup> His brothers went and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph reassured them, "Don't be afraid! Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> You intended to do me harm, but God intended to turn it to good in order to bring about what is happening today – the survival of many people. <sup>21</sup> So have no fear! I will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he touched their hearts and consoled them.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph remained in Egypt together with all his father's family. He lived for a hundred and ten years, <sup>23</sup> long enough to see Ephraim's great-grandchildren, and also to have the children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, placed on his knees after their birth.

<sup>24</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am going to die, but God will surely remember you and take you from this country to the land he promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." <sup>25</sup> Joseph then made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God comes to bring you out from here, carry my bones with you." <sup>26</sup> Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten; they embalmed him and laid him in a coffin in Egypt.

Rom  
12:19  
1Thes  
5:15  
Rom  
8:28

Ex  
13:19  
Jos  
24:32  
Heb  
11:22

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• **50.15** Note how Jacob and Joseph die: believers of ancient times were still ignorant of the resurrection of the dead. They lived the lives God gave them on this earth to the fullest; they were guided by the conviction that in their faithfulness to their mission, they were laboring for a better world which their children would see. The long and happy years that God had given them after their trials led them to understand that God was just and generous with all people.

Yet, while they did not hope for a life beyond, they were lacking a great deal to be fulfilled persons. They thought that when a person died, part of the spirit went to live below the earth *next*

*to his fathers* in a place from which God was absent as were the cares of the living. They thought God their friend and faithful defender would allow them to be lost forever! They must have had to repress their longing and silence their doubts to convince themselves that such a thing was just and good.

Their efforts to be resigned made them serious, conscientious people, subject to the mysterious will of God: but in exchange they were not given the happiness and spontaneity of children and a passionate love for their Savior. In that, they were not very different from good atheists or people of good faith though poorly informed, who live without faith in the resurrection.