

**Notes on the Book of Genesis**  
(two of three)

**Chapter Nine**

**Vs. 1: And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.**

The beginning of God speaking with Noah which goes through vs. 17 and deals with the covenant he is about to establish.

*Blessed* (barak): the object being Noah along with his sons or male heirs as opposed to the women on board the ark (“them”).

Compare this second (post-flood) event which has elements both parallel and different from the first one of 1.28: “And God *blessed* them (the man and the woman), and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’” Both verses use the words parah (*be fruitful*), ravah (*multiply*) and fill (mala’), all similar in sound especially when used in the imperative. The object: ‘eretz as distinct from ‘adamah.

**Vs. 2: The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.**

*Fear* (mora’): connotes reverence as in Mal 1.6: “And if I am a master, where is my *fear*?”

*Dread* (chat): from a verbal root meaning “to break, “to be confounded.” “They are *dismayed* and have turned backward” [Jer 46.5]. Both are used with respect to Noah and his sons (“you”) and apply to three different types of beings: birds, creeping things and fish. Such fear and dread find their full effect by a three-fold imposition, that is, *upon* (hal) these three categories of living beings.

*Delivered* (natan): alternately, “to give,” “to cause to receive.” Note the niphil, “*are delivered*,” although God is the one effecting this, it is presented in the passive mode as though the delivery which God imparts to Noah and his sons was one step removed. “Hand” can signify that Noah and his descendants can do with the animals whatever they wished.

Compare the struggle with created beings implied in this verse with Is 11.9: “They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.” Reference to water/sea is interesting in light of the flood which had just receded.

**Vs. 3: Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.**

*Moving thing* (remes): first used in 1.26 which speaks of the “first dominion” and applied to “*every creeping thing* that creeps upon the earth.” Remes concerns reptiles; it also means sea creatures and can be extended to all land animals as in the verse at hand. “Yonder is the sea, great and wide, which *teems* with things (teeming things) innumerable, living things both small and great” [Ps 104.25].

There is an association between “moving things” and *green plants* (hesev) to which this verse alludes (1.30) or the “sixth day.” The words “as I gave you” of the verse at hand can be related to God’s statement in 1.31, “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” That is to say, the original goodness of creation is to be extended to the post-flood era.

Note that 1.30 reads “everything that has the breath of life;” God does not give them for human consumption, just the green plants.

Compare the active “I give you” with the passive “they are given” of the previous verse.

**Vs. 4: Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.**

The (“only”) prohibition God gives to Noah and his sons with regard to food is not eating animals “with its life” or “blood.” This verse finds a kind of precedent in 4.11, of Cain’s murder of his brother Abel which is developed shortly afterwards: “And now you are cursed from the ground which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.” It also finds echo later in Acts 15.20: “to abstain from the pollutions of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood.” Note the connection between idols, sexual misconduct and blood, all having to do with propagation in one way or another.

**Vs. 5: For your lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning; of every beast I will require it and of man; of every man’s brother I will require the life of man.**

“Your lifeblood” here in the Hebrew literally reads as “your blood *to* (l-) your *souls*,” nephesh. Blood’s fluid and vital character is identified with beings having the “breath of life” as noted under Gen 1.20: “Let the waters bring forth swarms of *living creatures*.” This phrasing is made all the more striking by *require a reckoning* or darash; an alternate meaning is “to inquire” with this verse’s sense of making a demand. “But his blood I will *require* at the watchman’s hand” [Ezk 33.6].

God’s reckoning is addressed to Noah but includes both beast and man. Although this reckoning does not apply in the common sense to a *beast* (chayah; applies to animals of all kinds), it may be seen in light of later ordinances with respect to animal sacrifices as described in Exodus 29. I.e., the sense of darash is bound up with *consecration* (qadash, verb) in the first verse of this chapter: “Now this is what you shall do to them to *consecrate* them, that they may serve me as priests.”

The notion of divine reckoning applies equally to the “*life of man*” or his nephesh noted in the first part of this verse.

**Vs. 6: Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in his own image.**

*Man* or ‘adam, as used in the previous verse. Note the association between the “redness” implied in this word with the redness of blood.

*Shed* (shaphak): the first time this verb is used in Genesis, again intimating Cain’s murder of Abel. “Or if I send a pestilence into that land and *pour out* my wrath upon it with blood, to cut off from it man and beast” [Ezk 14.19]. A parallel may be made between the idea of shedding, of pouring out, with the recent destructive flood.

Here *image* or tselem is used minus the 1.26 addition of “likeness.” Perhaps mention of image or that which is indelible in human nature can imply that after the banishment from Eden and the flood its essential quality will endure. On the other hand, likeness is subject to dispersal and requires special effort to be in accord with image. After the banishment from Eden human beings find it more difficult to recover their image through their likeness.

Vs. 7 brings to a close God’s words addressed to Noah and his sons begun in vs. 1. It reiterates the four-fold divine command to increase: “be fruitful,” “multiply,” “bring forth abundantly” and “multiply.” This verse echoes vs. 1 but adds *bring forth abundantly* or sharats; the basic meaning is “to creep,” “to crawl” and is used in 7.21: “all *swarming* creatures that *swarm* upon the earth.” Here the idea is that Noah’s descendants are to be like reptiles (the noun of this verbal root): not just reproduce but to do so almost with the blind vigor often associated with non-mammalian beings.

Vs. 8 is short, God addressing Noah and his sons; compare with vs. 1 which has God blessing them and then speaking with them through vs. 7.

**Vs. 9: “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you,**

Vss. 9-17 describes the *covenant* or *beryth* first noted in 6.18: “But I will establish my *covenant* with you,” that is, before the flood. At that time Noah had no inkling of what this covenant would involve except the divine command to gather two pairs of every animal, etc. The promise to “establish” it occurs after the command to construct an ark, not before.

*Behold* (*hineh*): as first noted in 1.29 and often used as a kind of self-reflection on God’s part before taking action. The action in vs. 9 is present as opposed to the future: *establish* or *qum* which as noted with respect to 6.18 fundamentally means “to arise,” arise as though the covenant were in a process of continual growth.

*Descendants* (*zereh*): alternately, “seed” as in 3.15: “between your *seed* and her *seed*.” With the present use of *qum* as just noted, the divine covenant may be said to “rise” to these generations which lie in the future. I.e., vs. 9 has no distinction between present and future which can be reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

The phrase “after you (Noah)” intimates the limited life span of Noah in the new creation. God’s relationship with humans from this point onwards takes place with a clear awareness of spacial and temporal limitations.

Vs. 10 is a kind of appendix to the previous one, that is, God includes under his covenant those animals which accompanied Noah in the ark. Obviously the covenant is one-way in that these animals are unaware of God’s intent; nevertheless, the notion of covenant embraces creation as a whole.

**Vs. 11: I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”**

*Establish* (*qum*): as in vs. 9; here it has a different form which better reads “cause to establish,” again, in the present tense followed by two verbs in the future. Here the covenant is two-fold by nature:

- 1) “all *flesh*” or *basar* which can apply to humans as well as other animate beings. They will not be *cut off* (*karath*) by *flood waters* or *mabul*, the latter first being used in 6.17; the following verse parallels the one at hand, namely, “But I will *establish* my covenant with you (etc.)” *Qum* is in the future tense before the flood occurred. A covenant is something which is “cut” and is often used with its establishment such as Ex 24.8: “Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord *has made* (‘has cut’) with you in accordance with all these words.” Thus in vs. 11 *karath* is negative and in the Exodus verse it is positive.
- 2) *Destroy* (*shachath*): as in vs. 11, “Now the earth was *corrupt* in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence.” Both verses deal with the ‘*eret*’ instead of ‘*adamah*’.

**Vs. 12: And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and between you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:**

Note the close connection between *sign* (‘*oth*’) and *covenant* (*beryth*). The latter forms the essence of a concordance between God and the earth and here is presented as being subordinate to the former. That is, the subject is not so much the covenant *per se* but tends to speak of it-as-sign. Keep in mind that ‘*oth*’—which is shortly put in terms of a rainbow—often connotes an object to be seen (cf. 1.14: “let them be for *signs* and for seasons and for days and for years”). Another use with respect to *beryth*: “This is a *sign* (keeping of sabbaths) between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord sanctify you” [Ex 31.13]. In the verse at hand, God *makes* (*natan*) this ‘*oth*/’*beryth*’; action occurs in the present. The verb more specifically means “to give” as opposed to fabricating something. Thus action is on imparting the divine sign/covenant.

*Between* (*beyn*): used three times or with respect to “me” or God, “you” or Noah and those beings endowed with *nepesh* as in 1.30: “everything that has the *breath* of life.” There is a close connection between Noah and “every living creature,” that is, they are “with” him and thereby partake in the covenant.

The present *giving* (natan) of the sign/covenant is, as noted, in the present tense. However, it extends into the future or “all *future* (holam) generations.” Although holam has this meaning it can also refer to the distant past: “Let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days *of old*” [Mic 7.14]. Thus holam starts with Noah and his family or after the flood and works from here into the future.

**Vs. 13: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.**

*Bow* (qesheth): the action of *setting* (natan) it is also in the present tense; another use of this verb as in vs. 12, “to give.” More often than not, this sign originates in a cloud and then extends to the earth. Furthermore, a rainbow sometimes has its two bases on the earth. Keep in mind the symbolism of a cloud at Mount Sinai, as the mysterious dwelling place of God. Bow has an essentially military application; one can then ask, if there is a bow, where is the arrow? “And the remainder of the *archers* of the mighty men of the sons of Kedar will be few” [Is 21.17]. For a verse in line with the one at hand, cf. Ezk 1.28: “Like the appearance of the *bow* that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about.” The “like” here pertains to a “human form” [vs. 26], more specifically, “the appearance of his loins” [vs. 27].

The bow is a kind of extension or the already noted sign/covenant of the previous verse. Now the verb is in the future tense, “it shall be.” Vs. 13 specifies the bow/sign/covenant as beyn God and beyn *earth* (‘eretz). The picture presented here may be viewed in light of the heavenly Jerusalem’s descent in Rev 21. Both are situated within the context of previous creations, the flood and “the first earth (which) had passed away” [vs. 1].

**Vs. 14: When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,**

“Bring clouds:” two words in Hebrew, one is a noun and the other is a verb: hanan which fundamentally means “to cover.” It also applies to the practice of witchcraft: “You shall not *practice* augury or *witchcraft*” [Lev 19.26], that is, something done under cover or in secret.

“Is seen:” as opposed to something similar to “when you see.” In Hebrew, the niphal or passive is used. With the just described covenant in mind, the bow/sign/covenant (in that order) suggests that it came on the scene or manifested itself for all to see. Similarly, the covenant was made between Noah and non-human creatures; it is therefore witnessed by all living beings.

**Vs. 15: I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.**

Vs. 14 flows directly into this one and sets the stage for divine *remembering* or zakar. Cf. 8.1: “But God *remembered* Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.” There it was pointed out that zakar is the verbal root for “male,” suggesting propagation as well as the bestowal of names. In the verse at hand, God’s remembering is in the future: apparently he sees the bow which reminds him of the (bow)/sign/covenant just delineated. Thus zakar is a kind of prompting to the all-inclusive “is seen” of vs. 14 or by Noah, his descendants and all living creatures. It also spills over to that beyn or between: “me,” “you,” “every living creature;” the last is specified as consisting of “all flesh” compared with vs. 12.

Three destructive elements: waters, flood, destroy, all mentioned in vs. 11. Since the rainbow heralds rain, the descendants of Noah could be fearful in that it foretold another flood; hence the divine prohibition against a second flood.

**Vs. 16: When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.”**

The bow’s presence in clouds hearkens back to “is seen” of vs. 14. In vs. 13 God sets it there (i.e., in the sense of *giving*, natan). The verse at hand can imply a more independent working of natural operations as opposed to a direct intervention by God. Still, the divine connection remains and contains a two-fold future action which God will take: “look upon” and “remember.” The Hebrew text literally reads, “will see it to

remembrance.” Thus divine vision effects the *zakar* of vs. 15; it flows directly into *zakar* by use of the preposition *l-* (*to*) prefixed to this word.

Here God’s remembering with respect to the “everlasting covenant” is placed “between God” and “every living creature.” That is, God seems to utter these words independently of himself.

Vs. 17 sums up what transpired since vs. 8; *establish* or *qum* is in the past tense compared with the present of vs. 11. In the verse at hand, the sign/covenant is refined a bit: between God and all flesh; Noah and his descendants are not mentioned in this covenant, almost as though the human element were intentionally omitted.

**Vs. 19: These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.**

The previous verse lists the three sons of Noah as Shem, Ham and Japheth. Ham is singled out as being the father of Canaan whom Noah later (vs. 25) curses for having seen his nakedness. Note that vs. 19 has the three sons departing the ark. This going-out may be coupled with the *peopling* (*naphats*) of the ‘erezt in order to re-establish human presence on it. The fundamental meaning of *naphats* is “to scatter,” “to disperse;” cf. its use in 10.5: From these the coastland peoples *spread*.” It is used negatively in 11.8: “So the Lord *scattered* them abroad from there over the face of all the earth.” From this verbal root is derived the noun *cloudburst*: “And the Lord will cause his majestic voice to be heard...with a *cloudburst* and tempest and hailstones” [Is 30.30]. With this alternate use, the “peopling” of the ‘erezt may be viewed as an inverse flood, that is, one of human beings.

**Vs. 20: Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard;**

For a background to this verse, cf. 5.29: (Lamach) “called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground which the Lord has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.’” Cain was a “*tiller* (hoved) of the *ground* (‘adamah) and was responsible for murdering his brother Abel. Similarly, Noah cultivated the ‘adamah but it is the ‘adamah after the flood. The Hebrew text lacks “*tiller*,” instead, it reads, “Noah *began* (*chalal*) a man the soil.” The notion behind this verb is piercing, opening, as if to signify that Noah perforated the ‘adamah as virgin territory after the flood. Compare with God compelling Adam to work the ‘adamah from which he had been taken (cf. 3.17-9).

The first act of Noah was to plant a *vineyard* or *karem* which may be paralleled with 2.8: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden.” Note the same verb (*natan*, *to plant*); Noah plants a vineyard for making wine; God plants a garden which may or may not include a vineyard. “My *vineyard*, my very own, is for myself” [Sg 8.12].

**Vs. 21: and he drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.**

This is the first mention of *wine* (*yayn*), the natural product of the vineyard. Nothing is said of Noah’s ability with respect to husbandry, just that the immediate effect or abuse of wine which made him *drunk* (*shakar*). “And they shall be *drunk* with their own blood as with wine” [Is 51.26].

While in his drunken stupor Noah laid *uncovered* (*galah*) in his tent; this verb suggests nakedness, the removal of a cover: “He has *taken away* the covering of Judah” [Is 22.8]. Compare with the nakedness of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden: “And the man and his wife were both *naked* and were not ashamed” [2.25]. There the verb *harom* is used which as noted, suggests craftiness.

Noah laying naked in his tent may be compared with the garments God made for Adam and Eve just prior to their expulsion from Eden in 3.21; the latter, in turn, contrast with those Adam and Eve made for themselves in 3.7 to conceal their nakedness from God’s sight.

**Vs. 22: And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.**

Even when Ham is singled out as being the “father of Canaan” in vs. 18, it portends his curse as delineated there with respect to vs. 25. Thus Canaan, while associated with sexual perversions (cf. Lev 18.24-30) in the context of Ham’s curse by Noah, is also the future inheritance of Israel after the Exodus: “I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners (reference to Gen 17.8)” [Ex 6.4].

*Nakedness* (herwah): from the root harah; compare with harom noted in vs. 22, i.e., 2.25. This noun connotes dishonor as in Is 20.4: “So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians captives and the Ethiopians exiles...*naked* and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.” For a reference close to the meaning of the verse at hand: “You son of a perverse, rebellious woman...to the shame of your mother’s *nakedness*” [1 Sam 20.30]?

The father of Canaan told his brothers about Noah’s nakedness/shame. Ham did so “outside;” He could have been in the same tent with his father or passed by and then entered.

**Vs. 23: Then Shem and Japeth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness.**

Apparently Ham, the father of Canaan, did not participate in this gesture by his two brothers. Another reference to *garment* or *salmah* is Mic 2.8: “but you rise against my people as an enemy; you strip the *robe* from the peaceful.” Compare with the gesture noted in Rt 3.9: “Spread your skirt over your maidservant, for you are next of kin.”

Both this walking backwards and turning away of face represents shame and respect for Noah’s condition. It is not entirely unlike the human response to God’s presence, for example, when Moses first encounter God: “And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God” [Ex 3.6].

Vs. 24 posits a unity between Noah *awaking* (*yaqats*) and *knowing* (*yadah*) from his drunken stupor. With regard to the former verb, compare its use in Gen 28.16: “Then Jacob *awoke* from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’”

Vss. 25-7 contain a curse and a blessing by Noah upon his three sons which may be outlined as follows:

-Canaan or Ham; Noah addresses or curses him as a nation as opposed to his name Ham. *Cursed* or ‘*arar* as in 8.21: “I will never again *curse* the ground because of man.” The form of this curse is that Canaan/Ham will be a “*slave* (heved) of *slaves*” to his two brothers, Shem and Japeth, or be at the very bottom of the social status. The context may be summed up by Lev 18.30: “So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs...and never to defile yourselves by them.”

-*Blessed* (*baruk*): from the verbal root *barak*, here with respect to Shem. The Hebrew text reads, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem.”

-*Enlarge* (*patah*): in the sense of spreading; also means “to persuade” in the sense of flattery: “But they *flattered* him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues” [Ps 78.36]. Note the connection between *patah* and the proper name *Japheth*, *Yepheth*. Noah desires that he *live* (*shakan*) “in the tents of Shem” or to maintain a relationship with him. For another reference with this verb: “He will  *dwell* on the heights” [Is 33.16]. Noah also desires that Canaan/Ham be subjected as a slave to his two brothers as noted in vss. 26-7.

Chapter Nine concludes with a statement of Noah’s longevity, 950 years, 350 of which were after the flood. This last mention of “flood” sets the stage for

Chapter Ten’s detailed description of the descendants of Noah’s three sons, thereby setting the stage for the development of history “after the flood” [10.1].

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## Chapter Ten

This chapter follows a genealogical table of peoples grouped more according to their historic and geographic contexts than according to their ethnic affinities. Words typical throughout are “sons,” “lands,” “language,” “father,” “land,” “city,” “territory,” “families” and “nations.” The very last verse (32) sums up this pattern: “These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.” Not the connection between the nine (masculine) terms and *spread abroad* (parad); this verb is used in 2.10: “A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it *divided* and became four rivers.” For another use of parad, cf. Ps 92.9: “For, lo, your enemies, O Lord, for, lo, your enemies shall perish; all evildoers shall be *scattered*.”

As at the beginning of this chapter the end concludes with the words “after the flood” which sets the stage for the tower of Babel and genealogies of Abraham.

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## Chapter Eleven

### **Vs. 1: Now the whole earth had one language and few words.**

Despite the detailed genealogies of Chapter Ten, these various groupings were united as far as language goes. To demonstrate this unity, note the similarity between *whole earth* (kal-‘eretz) and *one language* (saphah ‘echath). To counter this unity, cf. the following references in the previous chapter (10): “These are the sons of Japheth in their lands, each with his own *language*” [vs. 5]; “These are the sons of Ham, by their families, their *languages*” [vs. 20]; “These are the sons of Shem, by their families, their *languages*” [vs. 31]. Here is the first mention of *language* (lashon) in accord with Noah’s three sons. This term also means “tongue, “speech:” “A people of foreign *speech* (lashon) and hard *tongue*” [Ezk 3.5]. Saphah as used in 11.1 can mean “lip:” “But oh, that God would speak, and open his *lips* to you” [Job 11.5].

“*Few words:*” the adjective ‘echad which basically means “first,” “one;” the latter is used in 1.5: “And there was evening and there was morning, *one* day (or ‘day one’).”

The primeval unity of speech is soon to be lost; Christian tradition sees a recovery of this unity of speech in the Holy Spirit’s descent at Pentecost: “And how is it that we hear each of us in his own native language” [Acts 2.8]? Also cf. Rev 7.9-10: “After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb!’”

### **Vs. 2: And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.**

*East* (qedem): this direction is first mentioned in 2.8: “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the *east*.” Also, it was the side of Eden from which God banished the man: “He drove out the man; and at the *east* of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim (etc).” Perhaps this migration...it took place after the flood when Eden was destroyed...can be taken as a sign of the innate human tendency to reside as close to paradise lost as possible.

*Migrated* (nasah): fundamentally, “to pull up” in the sense of breaking camp; it thus suggests temporary living as opposed to a permanent residence and here describes that movement from the east. I.e., people after the flood had been “camped” in the east and spread out to the three other cardinal points. “Then they *journeyed* from Bethel; and when they were still some distance from Ephrath, Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor” [35.16].

*Plain* (biqhah): from a verbal root meaning “to cleave” and hence, something lying in between two mountains or hills; it can also apply to a valley. “I will open rivers on the bare heights and fountains in the midst of the *valleys*” [Is 41.18]. In the verse at hand, biqhah is associated with the “land of Shinar” or Babylon; cf. 10.10: “The

beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar.” Reference here is to Nimrod, “the first on earth to be a mighty man” [10.8].

*Settled* (yashav): the opposite of nasah. Perhaps Shinar/Babylon was an approximation of the Garden of Eden even if dimly perceived. Note that 2.14 has one of the four branches of the river that flowed from Eden as the Euphrates (cf. 2.14), this area which had been chosen and can bridge the connection with Eden.

**Vs. 3: And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone and bitumen for mortar.**

“To one another” is literally expressed in the Hebrew text as “They said man to his neighbor” which signifies spontaneity or unity at the task about to be accomplished.

The exclamation “Come” signals that the migrants have reached a place to settle down permanently. This permanence is expressed by the elements necessary for constructing a building, bricks and mortar. Vs. 3 may be paralleled with the hard labor imposed upon the Israelites by the Egyptians in order to construct their buildings: “and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick and in all kinds of work in the field; in all their work they made them serve with rigor” [Ex 1.14]. In contrast to this slave labor, the “Come” of vs. 3 represents free service.

**Vs. 4: Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”**

A continuation of the previous verse with another exhortation the newly arrived migrants expressed among each other, “Come.”

Now that these people had bricks and mortar available they set about the task of building a city and tower; the Hebrew reads, “let us build to ourselves” which further expresses the desire for a permanent dwelling place. This is the third mention in Genesis of a city, the first associated with Enoch (cf. 4.17) and the second (10.11): “(Nimrod) built Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is, the great city.”

*Tower* (migdal): a structure erected along with the city, most likely in its center. This term is often used with regard to fortified cities and castles as well as a watchtower. “He built a *watchtower* in the midst of it and hewed out a wine vat in it” [Is 5.2].

*Top* (ro’sh): in the fundamental sense of “head” which extends into the heavens; the very first verse of Genesis has God making the heavens and the earth. Thus the heavens to can represent the attempt not so much to reach God by human means but the extreme or highest point of his creation. The plural “heavens” may be contrasted with the singular “heaven,” often used to denote God’s dwelling: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord has them in derision” [Ps 2.4]...a verse which easily applies to the one under consideration.

The construction of this city and tower has a two-fold purpose:

- 1) to obtain renown or “name:” “Children and the building of a city establish a man’s *name*, but a blameless wife is accounted better than both” [Sir 40.19].
- 2) to prevent the new migrants from reverting back to their nomadic way of life, that is, to avert being *scattered* (puts). Compare the use of this verb with 9.19: “These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was *peopled*.”

**Vs. 5: And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.**

*Came down* (yasad): in the sense of making a descent; cf. Ex 3.8 for a parallel sense and with the same verse: “and I have *come down* to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land.” Both verses may be related to 3.8: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in



the cool of the day.” Here there is no divine descent; God is on the same horizontal plane, as it were, with Adam and Eve. Yarad suggests a greater distance from the human race; it is interesting to keep this verb in mind with regard to the upward-reaching tower which militates against the divine yarad.

“To see,” an action by God after his descent; it is as though God were walking through the city on the same level with it and gazing up at the tower which he perceived as an affront to his divinity.

“Sons of men:” as opposed to plain “men” as in vs. 2; “sons” intimates the earthly origins of the human race in comparison with God’s descent.

**Vs. 6: And the Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; and nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.**

The opening words of this verb may be seen as God speaking to himself, a biblical way of expression internal self-reflection in an outward fashion. *Behold* or *hen* thus serves to introduce this divine reflection by way of exclamation.

*One* (‘echad): as in “few words” of vs. 1 and the reference to 1.5 as to a fuller sense of this adjective. In the verse at hand, ‘echad is used with “people one” and “language one;” cf. vs. 1 for *lashon* or *language*.

*Beginning* (chalal): a verb is used here which reads in the Hebrew text, “this they *began* to do;” past tense in reference to the construction of a city and tower. Cf. 9.20 which uses chalal: “Noah was the *first* (i.e., ‘began’) tiller of the soil.”

*Propose* (zamad): connotes murmuring, of proposing in an (often) negative sense: “The wicked *plots* against the righteous and gnashes his teeth at him” [Ps 37.12]. *Zamad* is bound up with the something difficult or *impossible* to effect (*bastar*) as in Job 42.2 which follows the same structure but in a different sense: “I know that you (God) can do all things, and that no *purpose* of yours can be *thwarted*.”

**Vs. 7: Come, let us go down, and there confuse their language that they may not understand one another’s speech.”**

The conclusion of God’s address or self-reflection. Here we have the third and final “come:” 1) vs. 3 where men propose to make bricks; 2) vs. 4 where they propose to construct a city and tower and 3) the verse at hand.

Note that vs. 5 already has the Lord having come down and as present within the city. Vs. 7 continues this theme, as though he had returned to his own dwelling and returns again. “Let us” parallels that creative burst of 1.26, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” Also cf. 18.21 which is more pertinent to the sentiment of the verse at hand: “I will go down to see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry which has come to me; and if not, I will know.”

*Confuse* (balal): fundamentally, “to swallow down,” “to devour.” “You will not let me alone while I *swallow down* my spittle” [Job 7.19]. *Balal* also means *to destroy* as in Ps 21.10: “You will *destroy* their offspring from the earth and their children from among the sons of men.”

The object of *balal* is “their *language*” or *saphah* which was one, ‘echad (vs. 1). In a broader sense, this verb is the exact opposite of the harmonizing principle expressed through the adjective; it creates, as it were a flood, of languages after the flood of water from which Noah and his family had recently emerged.

*Understand* (shamah): literally, “to hear.” Contrast this with the positive sense of hearing as in Dt 3.4, “*Hear* therefore, O Israel, the Lord our God is *one* (‘echad) Lord.” The about to be effected confusion is enhanced by the literal Hebrew text which reads, “not hear man the language of his neighbor.” I.e., the confusion is close and personal by this intimate form of human relationship.

*Speech*: another used of saphah; compare with “language” of vs. 1.

**Vs. 8: So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.**

*Scattered* (puts): a verb with the same intent as “confuse” and “not understand” of vs. 7. Puts brings to fulfillment of the people’s fear which obliged them to build the city and tower, vs. 4: “lest we be *scattered abroad* upon the face of the whole earth.” For another reference: “Strike the shepherd, that the sheep may be *scattered*” [Zech 13.7].

“From there” or the city and tower—two centers of unity and language—which are contrasted with “face of all the earth.”

The verse at hand says that the people ceased construction of the city; no mention is made of the *tower* (migdal) but may be implied by the verb *left off* or chadal since both rhyme. “Shall I go to battle against Ramoth-Gilead, or shall I *forbear*” [1 Kg 22.6]?

The preposition l- (*to*) prefixed to the verb “to build” heightens the sense of disruption with regard to constructing the city.

**Vs. 9: Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.**

Babel: the city’s name, not necessarily applied to the tower. When people migrated to the land of Shinar (vs. 1) they did not give a name to their city. The **RSV** says that Babel is interpreted as “gate of God” and became synonymous with the *confusion* of language (vs. 7, balal).

Contrast “(language) of all the earth” with “face of all the earth,” the latter being the place to which the Lord *scattered* (puts again) the builders of the city and tower. “Through Babylon should mount up to heaven, and though she should fortify her strong height, yet destroyers would come from me upon her, says the Lord” [Jer 51.53]. Also, “So shall Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence and shall be found no more” [Rev 18.21].

Contrast this scattering with the divine injunction given to Noah and his sons right after the flood: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.”

Despite the scattering of people with one language, there is not mention that the city and tower are destroyed.

The remaining verses of Chapter Eleven (10-32) present the *descendants* (toldoth; cf. 6.9 regarding Noah) of Shem. Noah blessed Shem as well as his brother Japheth (cf. 9.26-7); the latter is implied as being submissive to the former: “and let him dwell in the tents of Shem.” People descended from all three Noah’s sons began with tents as the sole means of habitation and had “one language and few words” noted in 11.1. Then upon destruction of the city of Babel, people were scattered and presumably dwelt in tents again. On the other hand, Ham or Canaan was cursed (cf. 9.25) and became a slave to Shem and Japheth; Ham’s descendants were ultimately responsible for founding Babel (cf. 10.10) which may intimate the eventual scattering of people from that city.

On the positive side, the genealogy of vss. 10-32 focuses upon Shem’s descendants which narrows down to Terah’s three sons (vs. 26) and hence to Abram (vs. 27) who is later described as migrating from his homeland and living in tents, again, in contrast to the city of Babel and his sojourn in Egypt (cf. 12.10-20).

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## Chapter Twelve

**Vs. 1: Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you.**

The call of Abram occurs after the extended genealogy of Shem begun in 11.10, the third genealogy after the flood as well as the dispersion after the confusion of tongues at Babel. God’s address to Abram continues through vs. 3.

*Said-go* (lek-leka): note the play on words, literally, “go to you,” indicating a specific form of departure.

This verse may be viewed in light of 11.31: “Terah took Abram his son and Lot the son of Haran, his grandson, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram’s wife, and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan.” The command of God to Abram involves a three-fold departure which starts from a general area to a more specific household:

- 1) from Abram’s *country* or ‘*eretz*.
- 2) from Abram’s *kindred* or *moledeth*: from the verbal root *yadah* (*to give birth*) and signifies origin as in Est 2.10: “Esther had not made known her people or *kindred*, for Mordecai had charged her not to make it known.”
- 3) from the house of Abram’s father who is Terah (cf. 11.27).

The place of migration is an ‘*eretz* which God will *show* to Abram, *ra’ah*, the common verb “to see.” Two pertinent verses concerning the one at hand: 1) “Wisdom also...recognized the righteous man and preserved him blameless before God” [Wisd 10.5]. 2) “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go” [Heb 11.8].

Thus vs. 1 may be outlined as: *said*->*go*->*show*. Abram can get a handle on the first two but the third...of seeing...remains to be demonstrated.

**Vs. 2: And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.**

This verse contains three future promises by God with a result; contrast with the forced exile of the man from the Garden of Eden (“He drove out the man,” 3.24). Vs. 2 may be outlined as follows:

- 1) “great *nation* (*goy*):” the common term for any grouping of people; *goy* is often contrasted with the nation of Israel: “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the *nations*” [Is 42.6]: words echoed in Lk 2.32: “A light for revelation to the Gentiles (i.e., the *goy*) and for glory to your people Israel.”
- 2) *bless* (*barak*): “So then, those who are men of faith are *blessed* with Abraham who had faith” [Gal 3.9].
- 3) *name* (*shem*): as inferred by Heb 11.12: “Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

The result of all future divine promises is directed for the purpose of making Abram a *blessing* or *berakah*. “May he give the *blessing* of Abraham to you and to your descendants with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings which God gave to Abraham” [28.4]!

**Vs. 3: I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”**

*Bless* (*barak*) and *curse* (*qalal*): two opposite states which show the close identification between God and Abram. Cf. 8.21 for use of the latter: “I will never again *curse* the ground because of man.” Compare *qalal* in both cases with the verb ‘*arar* (which connotes the casting of a spell) as used in 3.14: “*Cursed* (the serpent) are you above all cattle and above all wild animals.”

The close connection between *bless* and *curse* applies to Abram and “him who curses you.” Note that the second half of vs. 3 mentions *families* or *mishpachah* as in 10.5: “each with his own language, by their *families*,

in their nations.” This term can mean “tribe” and pertains to a smaller grouping of people (family in the extended sense) as opposed to a nation. Here the fate of being cursed does not seem to apply.

Barak as related to families reads in the Hebrew text, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” which mirrors of God’s (active) blessing of Abram. Note the connection between “families” and *earth* or ‘adamah, i.e., not ‘eretz.

**Vs. 4: So Abram went as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.**

After God’s address in vss. 1-3, Abram follows up on the words “Go from your country->kindred->father’s house.” I.e., here we have two verses in harmony: 1) between the halak of vs. 1 and the halak of the verse at hand. 2) between that “the Lord *said* (‘amar)” and the *told* (davar) of the present one. The former involves “saying” and the latter, “speaking” which is more direct. Thus Abram perceives a unity between *going* and *speaking* or halak/davar.

Lot is first mentioned in 11.27: “Terah was the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran; and Haran was the father of Lot.” Lot is thus singled out along with Abram and remains secondary to the divine call. “And if he rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the licentiousness of the wicked” [2 Pt 2.7].

The advanced age of seventy-five—although considerably less than the post-flood generations—highlights the obedience of Abram to leave his country, kindred and father’s house (cf. vs. 1). His point of departure is Haran, the same name applied to Abram’s father as mentioned in the last paragraph.

The departure of Abram described in vs. 5 may be paralleled with Noah’s preparation for his departure or entrance into the ark (“you, your sons, your wife and your sons’ wives with you,” 6.18). It is outlined as follows:

-Abram took Sarai his wife as well as Lot. Note that vs. 5 says he *took* Lot; vs. 4 says that “Lot went with him.” -*possessions* (rekush, vs. 5): in the sense of “substance,” “wealth.” “Passover offerings for all that were present, lambs and kids from the flock to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls; these were from the king’s *possessions*” [2 Chron 35.7].

-*gathered* (rachash): the verbal root for rekush, *possessions*. The only other biblical references are 31.18, 36.6 and 46.6. Also people obtained in Haran, most likely slaves, are the object of this verb.

-Canaan: the destination of Abram, Lot and Sarai along with people from Haran, keeping in mind obedience to the divine summons of vs. 1. Canaan is first mentioned as a person in 8.18 (“Ham was the father of Canaan”); 12.5 first states this word as a place in 11.31 (“and they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan”). Although Abram complied with God’s summons, these earlier references to Canaan show that the collective journey was not to an unfamiliar place but one rooted in the wanderings of Abram’s family. Thus “the land that I will show you” of vs. 1 is one that had already been shown to Abram, if it may be put this way.

**Vs. 6: Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land.**

*Passed through* (havar): also implies the sense of going beyond a given place or one in which a person is situated. The Hebrew text literally reads, “passed through *in* (b-) the land,” use of this preposition can signify that Abram accomplished his havar within this broader context.

Although God’s original command to Abram to forsake his native land lacked specific direction yet involved familiar territory as noted in the last section, his destination here is more explicit or two-fold:

-Shechem: cf. 33.18: “And Jacob came safely to the city of Shechem which is in the land of Canaan.” Note that vs. 20 reads that “There he erected an altar and called it El-Elohe-Israel” which translates as “God, the God of

Israel.” Jacob built this altar after his reconciliation with his brother Esau. Shechem is also found in Chapter Nine of Judges: “Abimelech, Gideon’s half-Canaanite son, went there in an attempt to usurp kingship over Israel. “God has spoken in his sanctuary: ‘With exultation I will divine up Shechem and portion out the Vale of Succoth” [Ps 69.6]. In the verse at hand, Shechem is specified even further as a *place* or maqom which alternately means “town,” “village.” “Will you then destroy the *place* and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it” [18.24]?

-“*oak of Moreh* (‘elon):” for another reference, cf. Dt 11.30: “Are they not beyond the Jordan, west of the road, toward the going down of the sun, in the land of the Canaanites who live in the Arabah, over against Gilgal, beside the *oak of Moreh*?” Reference here is to the blessing and curse of vs. 26.

-*at that time* (‘az): Used to introduce the second sentence contained in vs. 6, that is, with respect to the Canaanites whom Israel later dispossessed. Refer back to Noah’s curse of Canaan in 9.25. The presence of these people among whom Abram and his extended family migrated suggests danger and impending conflict. **Vs. 7: Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.**

*Appeared* (ra’ah): use of the common verb “to see.” Compare with vs. 1 which says that the Lord spoke to Abram; i.e., here in the land of Canaan the Lord first appears to him which is followed by a speaking (“said”).

The Lord’s words to Abram do not concern Abram himself but his *descendants* or zereh which as noted in 3.15 means “seed.” Compare with Moses who did not enter the Promised Land but viewed it from afar: “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, ‘I will give it to your *descendants*” [Dt 34.4].

*Altar* (mizbeach): this is the second mention of the term in Genesis, the first being in 8.20: “Then Noah built an *altar* to the Lord...and offered burnt offerings on the *altar*.” Nothing is said about sacrifices made here, simply that Abram erected the altar which could be taken as a memorial.

*There* (sham): a word meaning that which is specific and can refer to the oak of Moreh. Contrast it with ‘az of vs. 6 (*at that time*), another word of specification or when Canaanites were in the land.

*Appeared* (ra’ah) the second use of this verb in the same sentence. There is a close connection between Abram’s response to the Lord’s appearance (which re-enforces his willingness to follow divine summons) and his awareness that possession of Canaan lies not with him in the present but in the future. Again, cf. Jacob’s altar at Shechem (33.18) noted under vs. 6.

**Vs. 8: Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord.**

*Removed* (hataq): also connotes a setting free, obtaining freedom. “Those who are weaned from the milk, those *taken* from the breast” [Is 28.9]. As noted in vs. 2, east is associated with the Garden of Eden, of dwelling as closely as possibly to its realization. In the verse at hand, the actual removal suggests the pulling up tents and heading eastward. “Thence” is Shechem and the oak of Moreh of vs. 6.

Bethel translates as “House of God” and by reason of its name shares in some of that symbolism of the east. Bethel is further specified as where Abram pitched his tent, i.e., “with Bethel” or akin to being as close to the Garden of Eden as possible.

Ai figures later in Joshua 7-8 with respect to the sin of Achan. After his victory over this city, Joshua “built an altar in Mount Eval to the Lord, the God of Israel” [8.30]. Construction of this altar may be paralleled with Abram doing the same in the verse at hand, as if he foresaw victory over Ai.

*Name* (shem): note the Hebrew text which literally reads, “called *in* (b-) the *name* of the Lord.”

The length of time Abram remains in this area is not stated. Perhaps his building of the altar is necessary for him to retain the original divine command of vs. 1, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s

house.”

Vss. 9-20 or to the conclusion of Chapter Twelve tells of an incident in Egypt with Abram’s wife Sarai. Before actually going there (which may be a kind of foretelling of Israel’s descent in chapter 46), Abram journeyed to the Negeb. Then a famine compels Abram to enter; compare with Joseph’s brothers who went to Egypt to purchase bread (cf. 42.1+).

Vs. 17: The Lord *afflicts* (nagah) Pharaoh, a verb which fundamentally means “to touch,” “to reach.” With this in mind, it is as though God actually reached out and touched Pharaoh or tormented him with plagues. “Saul also went to his home at Gibeah and with him went men of valor whose hearts God had *touched*” [1 Sam 10.26]. For a reference closely akin to the verse at hand, cf. Ex 11.1: “Yet one *plague* (negeph) more I will bring upon Pharaoh and upon Egypt,” namely, the death of the firstborn.

Chapter Twelve continues with Pharaoh sending Abram and his wife Sarai on their way which may be taken as in line with this chapter’s first verse, God’s summons that Abram leave his native place.

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### Chapter Thirteen

Vs 1: The last verse of the last chapter has Pharaoh sending Abram and his family away, most likely to the border area of Egypt, for the verse at hand says that he “went up from Egypt” to the Negeb. According to 12.9, Abram journeyed to the Negeb after he built an altar to the Lord and called upon his name. Compare with the forced departure of Israel later on in Ex 12.31: “And he summoned Moses and Aaron by night and said, ‘Rise up, go forth from among my people, both you and the people of Israel.’”

Vs. 2: Abram is *rich* (kaved): the verb kavad is used here from which is derived kavod or *glory*, a term applied to the presence of God. The fundamental meaning is “to be heavy” in the sense of being weighted down. In the verse at hand, Abram is not simply rich but *very* much so, me’od, a term which means anything to excess. “The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the *rich* has many friends” [Prov 14.20].

The wealth consists in cattle, silver and gold. Most likely Abram acquired these possessions in Egypt, in a sense, a foreshadowing of Israel’s despoiling of that country: “For they had asked of the Egyptians jewelry of silver and of gold and clothing” [Ex 12.35].

Vs. 3: As in 12.9, no mention is made of Abram staying for an extended period in the Negeb. He continues to retrace his steps back from Egypt to Bethel or the House of God as though the altar of 12.8 were summoning him through all his journeys down and up from Egypt.

-*Beginning* (techilah): “I will restore your judges as at the first and your counselors as at the *beginning*” [Is 1.26]. Note this word’s association with maqom (*place*) and tent (‘ohel); it is interesting that Abram returns from Egypt, distinguished for its large, stable buildings in preference for the impermanence of dwelling in a tent. After all, Abram was returning to the altar he had constructed before descending into Egypt.

Vs. 4: Mention of the *altar* or mizbeach (12.7) which Abram erected “at the *beginning*” (ri’shon). Reference is to just before Abram’s descent, but this phrase is interesting in that it suggests a kind of pre-Exodus descent into Egypt and a desire to recover such a beginning. After all, this beginning is where Abram “called on the name of the Lord” [vs. 4].

Vss. 5-7 speaks of the combined wealth of both Lot (the ancestor of Moab) and Abram, so much that “the land could not *support* them” which literally reads, “not raise them to dwell together.” The verb yashav (*support*) suggests that the land or Bethel was too confining for their large herds.

-The *strife* or ryv is not so much between Abram and Lot but between their herdsmen or those who managed the primary wealth for these nomads, that is, cattle, which was more important than the silver and gold mentioned in vs. 2. “How can I bear alone the weight and burden of you and your *strife*” [Dt 1.12]?

Vs. 9: The *separation* (parad, verb used here) connotes scattering. "When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he *separated* the sons of men" [Dt 32.8]. In the verse at hand, the separation is intended to avert the strife already described. Compare parad with the words, "Is not the whole land before you (Lot)?"

Vs. 10: The lifting of Lot's eyes to see this "whole land" may be contrasted with the dialogue he was having with Abram; i.e., he takes attention off the strife at Abram's invitation. The land in question is the Jordan valley compared with the "*garden* (gan) of the Lord," that is, Eden: "A river flowed out of Eden to water the *garden*, and there it divided and became four rivers" [2.10]. Lot may have had in mind tradition about the Garden of Eden or awareness of being made in the divine image and likeness which prompted him to compare the Jordan valley with Eden.

-Compare parad as *separation* with parad as *divided*...as though the strife between Lot and Abram were resolved in the single river being distributed. The word for *watered* is shaqah as in Ps 104.13: "From your lofty abode you *water* the mountains; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work." Note that the Jordan valley/Eden resembles Egypt, hence the Nile.

-Zoar: "Little" as noted in 19.20, the place to which Lot and his family fled to avoid the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Jordan valley, with its watered territory, was there to lead the way as if to foretell Lot's escape route.

Vs. 11: *valley* (kakar): as in the previous verse; this word applies to the circumference of a given tract or as going around it: "And the sons of the singers gathered together from the *circuit* round Jerusalem" [Neh 12.28].

-Lot travels east, that is, the direction reminiscent of the Garden of Eden whose image (Jordan valley) was noted in vs. 10.

Vs. 12: Abram dwells in Canaan and Lot "*among* (b-, *in*) the cities of the valley." Compare with later in this verse that Lot still apparently used tents which he moved to Sodom.

Vs. 13: Despite the Jordan valley resembling Eden, the inhabitants there were (literally) "wicked and sinners to the Lord *excessively* (me'od)."

Vss. 14-17 contain the Lord's address to Abram as to the promise first stated in 12.7, "to your descendants I will give this land." There it was noted that Abram's descendants will inherit the land; here Abram is included as well.

-"Lift up your eyes:" as in vs. 10 where Lot did the same.

-The *place* or maqom in which Abram was standing (Canaan, cf. vs. 12) extends to the four cardinal directions of north, south, east and west as opposed to the single direction Lot chose, east (cf. vs. 11).

Vs. 16: descendants as *dust* (haphar): used negatively with regard to the serpent in 3.14: "and *dust* you shall eat;" also the element from which the first man was made: "The Lord God formed man of *dust* from the ground." Later in 28.14 the same promise is given to Jacob during his dream: "and your descendants shall be like the *dust* of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south."

Vs. 17: After pointing out the four cardinal points Abram is to inherit, the Lord bids him first to arise (as though he were lying prostrate) and then walk through it. Two basic features of this land are its *length* ('orek) and *breadth* (rochav). "To comprehend with all the saints (i.e., Abram's descendants) what is the *breadth* and *length* and height and depth" [Eph 3.18].

-Even though Abram is bidden to walk through the land's length and breadth, he still does not possess it ("I will give it to you").

Vs. 18: "*oaks* ('elon) of Mamre:" cf. 12.6, "Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the *oak* of Moreh: as in preparation for God manifesting himself later in 18.1: "And the Lord appeared to him by the *oaks* of Mamre." In both Moreh and Mamre Abram built an altar to the Lord, the former in response to the promise of being given the land and the latter (which similarly includes this) after Abram walked through the

land's length and breadth.

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## Chapter Fourteen

The bulk of this chapter describes the alliance of four eastern kings who fought against Sodom and Gomorrah, having led into captivity Lot, "the son of Abram's brother" [vs. 12]. Vss. 13-17 recount Abram's defeat of these kings after which he encountered King Melchizedek of Salem. Salem is a name for Jeru(salem): "His abode has been established in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion" [ps 76.2]. Note that the king of Sodom went out to meet Abram along with Melchizedek. Naturally Sodom is associated with God's wrath and the destruction that is to take place several chapters later.

Vs. 18: Melchizedek *brought out* (yatsa') bread and wine as offerings; he as a king left his native dwelling place to meet Abram which can be taken as assuming a subordinate position.

-*Priest* (kohen): the first mention of this office in the Bible. Although Melchizedek was associated with Canaan and not the yet-to-be established priesthood in Israel, nevertheless the verse says he was a priest of "God the Most High." He may be compared with Jethro, the priest of Midian, to whom Moses had fled for refuge (cf. Ex 2.15-3.1). It with Jethro's flocks that Moses had his vision of God and the revelation of the divine name.

-Although he was not specifically a priest, the diviner Balaam acknowledges the sovereignty of Israel's God: "The oracle of him who hears the words of God and knows the knowledge of the Most High, who sees the vision of the Almighty" [Num 24.16].

-Chapter Seven of Hebrews discusses at great length the role of Melchizedek as foreshadowing the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Also: "You are priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" [Ps 110.4]. Cf. the **Notes on the Book of Hebrews** elsewhere on this Home Page which outlines the comparison between Melchizedek and Jesus Christ.

Vs 19: The previous verse states that Melchizedek is a "priest of God the Most High." In the verse at hand, he addresses Abram as blessed by "God Most High" and adds "maker of heaven and earth." I.e., Melchizedek submits his divine priesthood to Abram.

Vs. 20: *delivered* (magan): the object being Abram's enemies. The only other reference of this verb is Prov 4.9: "She will place on your head a fair garland; she will *bestow* on you a beautiful crown." From this verbal root comes the noun "shield."

Vss. 21-4 deal with the king of Sodom who, unlike Melchizedek, demands from Abram people with him, possibly as slaves. Compare with the inhabitants of Sodom who made the request just before that city's destruction, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us that we may know them" [19.5].

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## Chapter Fifteen

**Vs. 1: After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."**

"After these *things*:" hadevarym, from the same verbal root as "word" which is noted immediately below.

"*Word of the Lord*:" devar, which parallels the Greek logos; from the common verbal root davar, *to speak*. Although the Lord has already spoken numerous times thus far in Genesis, this is the first instance where the common biblical phrase "word of the Lord" is used; usually it is associated with the prophets. "To whom (Jeremiah) the *word* of the Lord came in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah" [Jer 1.2].



“Came” is lacking in the Hebrew text which has instead, “was to Abram.”

*Vision* (machazeh): the first mention of this term which later became a common means of divine communication; from the verbal root *chazah*, *to see* in the sense of beholding. The following contains both terms: “The oracle of him who hears the words of God, who *sees* the *vision* of the Almighty” [Num 24.4]. In the verse at hand, note that the divine *devar* is seen, almost as though it unraveled like a scroll for Abram to behold.

Since this is the first recorded vision, a means of divine communication unfamiliar to people, it is understandable that the Lord says “fear not” along with mentioning Abram by his proper name.

*Shield* (magen): mention of this protective device can be taken to make more sense to Abram after his recent defeat of the four kings in the previous chapter. Cf. 14.20 for the verbal root to this noun: “Blessed be god Most High, who has *delivered* your enemies into your hand!” For another reference to this noun commonly applied to God: “But you, O Lord, are a *shield* about me” [Ps 3.3].

*Reward* (sakar): from the verbal root meaning “to hire,” “to bribe:” “But he had pronounced the prophecy against me because Tobiah and Sanballat had *hired* him” [Neh 6.12]. The reward to Abram is “*very great*” or *me’od* as first noted in 1.31: “and behold, it was *very good*” in the sense of being excessively good.

Note the present tense or God-as-shield and the future tense connected with reward.

Vss. 2-6 relate the covenant God is about to make with Abram which may be outlined as follows:

Vs. 2: “Abram *said*” ‘amar, the common verb which is interesting to compare after the “*word* (*devar*) of the Lord,” i.e., Abram’s response to the divine vision.

-*Childless* (haryry): from the verbal root meaning “to be bare.” “Write this man down as *childless*, a man who shall not succeed in his days” [Jer 22.30]. Stephen makes reference to Abram in Acts 7.5: “Yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot’s length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child.”

-The Hebrew text lacks the word “heir;” instead it reads literally, “son of Damascus my house” referring to Eliezer, a slave.

Vs. 4: another coming (“was,” as in vs. 1) of the “*devar* of the Lord” as opposed to direct, one-on-one speaking between the Lord and Abram.

-*Heir* (yarash): the verb is used here as opposed to a noun. “But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall *inherit* my holy mountain” [Is 57.13].

Vs. 5: *outside* (chuts): as opposed to being inside which in this instance probably refers to a tent. In other words, the divine word/vision was uttered within Abram’s tent. “And the Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud; and the pillar of cloud stood by the door of the tent” [Dt 31.15].

-*Count* (saphar): the fundamental meaning of this verb is “to write.” “My tongue is like the pen of a ready *scribe* (noun)” [Ps 45.1]. It is almost as though Abram were bidden to write down on a tablet the multitude of stars. The same applies to the number of his *descendants* or *zereh*; cf. 9.9 where the alternate meaning of this word is noted as “seed.”

Vs. 6: *believed* (‘aman): the first use of this word in the sense of “faith.” Abram’s act of faith took place outside the tent, not inside, and during the night because only then were the stars visible for Abram to count.

-*Reckoned* (chashav): alternately as “to be accounted,” “to invent,” “to think.” “Why do you hide your face and *count* me as your enemy” [Job 13.24]? The object of the verb is *righteousness* or *tsedaqah*. For a New Testament development on this theme, cf. Chapter Four of Romans. The Greek translation (cf. Rom 4.32) has the words *logizomai* (chashav) which implies taking into account and deliberation and *dikaiousune* (tsedaqah).

Vs. 24 develops the notion of *logizomai* in light of faith in Jesus Christ “who was raised for our *justification* (*dikaiousune*).” Compare the righteousness of Abram with Noah: “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you are *righteous* before me in this generation” [7.1].

Vs. 7: This verse hearkens back to 11.31 when Terah, Abram's father, took him and Lot from Ur of the Chaldeans to the land of Canaan in order to settle in Haran. No mention is made there of the Lord's involvement in the migration. Perhaps vs. 7 is a revelation to Abram that the Lord had been active in this process and that Abram was unaware of it.

-*possess* (yarash): Note the two uses of the same word in the following: "You shall *inherit* their land, and I will give it to you to *possess*, a land flowing with milk and honey" [Lev 20.24]. This verb is the root for "heir." In this verse the first word for *land* is 'adamah; the second has 'eret. The Lord first gives Abram the land who must then possess it. The next verse (8) has Abram asking for a sign to *know* (yadah) about this possession. Here he posits a question which may be compared with a lack of questioning when asked to leave his native home in 12.1.

Vs. 9: The form of knowledge, as it were, which God gives to Abram is in terms of five animals for a sacrifice: heifer, she-goat, ram, turtledove and a young pigeon.

Vs. 10: Abram brought these five offerings *to* (l-) the Lord. No specific place is given but keep in mind when God began speaking with Abram in a vision (vs. 1) and outside (the tent?, vs. 5). As commented with respect to the latter, Abram is bidden to count the stars which means this divine communication was at night and when (presumably) Abram brings the five sacrifices. However, cf. vs. 12 which says "As the sun was going down..."

-*cut* (batar) them *in two* (batok): this verb applies to sacrifices and can also mean a section or part of a land as in Sg 2.17: "Be like a gazelle or a young stag upon *rugged* mountains." Note that the RSV has a footnote here, "the meaning of the Hebrew word is unknown."

-*and laid each half over against the other:* the Hebrew text literally reads, "and gave man his cutting against his neighbor."

-Abram does not *divide* or batar the birds (turtledove and young pigeon) in two, only the heifer, she-goat and ram.

Vs. 11: *birds of prey* (hayt): as in Is 46.11, "Calling a *bird of prey* from the east, the man of my counsel from a far country." The verbal root refers to any violent onrush as in 1 Sam 25.14: "And he *railed* at them."

Vs. 12: The sun was *going down* or bo'; this verb is often employed in the context of sunset as in Jdg 19.14: "The sun *went down* on them near Gibeah." Bo' commonly means "to enter," "to come," "to bring."

-*deep sleep* (tardemah): as used in 2.21, "So the Lord God caused a *deep sleep* to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh." Cf. remarks there regarding the verbal root radam (*to sleep* or to snore heavily). Both verses use the verb naphal (*to fall*). In both cases the LXX has for tardemah the Greek word ekstasis which can translate as "ecstasy." As noted with respect to vs. 10, the divine command to prepare the sacrifice can be taken as occurring at night whereas vs. 12 implies daylight, i.e., "the sun was going down."

-naphal is used a second time in vs. 12 with respect to two states concerning Abram, the first being tardemah:

1) *dread* ('eymah): as in Hab 1.7, "*Dread* and terrible are they; their justice and dignity proceed from themselves." The same word can apply to *idols*: "For it is a land of images, and they are mad over *idols*."

2) "great *darkness* (chashekah): usually in the negative sense as in Is 8.22: "And they will look to the earth but behold, distress and *darkness*, the gloom of anguish." In the verse at hand, this term can apply to God's presence as in Dt 5.23: "And when you heard the voice out of the midst of the *darkness*."

Vs. 13: Words from the Lord about Israel's forthcoming descent into Egypt and eventual liberation or Exodus. The words "Know of a surety" have in the Hebrew text a double use of the verb yadah, i.e., "know know" or take it to heart.

-the object of this "double" knowledge is the fate of Abram's *descendants* (zereh: cf. vs. 5, "so shall your *descendants...seed...be*") as *sojourners* or ger. This is the first occurrence of ger in the Bible which may be viewed in light of man's banishment from the Garden of Eden. For a reference in fulfillment of the verse at hand, cf. Ex 2.22: "She bore a son and he called his name (*Ger*)shom; for he said, 'I have been a *sojourner* in a foreign land.'"

-*slaves* (havad): in the Hebrew text the verb is used.

-*oppressed* (hanah): a verb which also connotes affliction as in Zech 10.2: "Therefore the people wander like sheep; they are *afflicted* for want of a shepherd." This prophecy seems to overlook the story of Joseph who brought Israel into Egypt.

Vs. 14: Both this and the preceding verses are to be seen in light of Ex 12.40-1: "The time that the people of Israel dwelt in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years. And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt." Most likely Abram had in mind the words "on that very day."

-*Bring judgment* (dyn): connotes a sense of ruling, of condemning: "For by these he *judges* peoples; he gives food in abundance" [Job 36.31].

-*nation* (goy): a term normally used to distinguish Israel from other peoples but cf. 12.2: "I will make of you a great *nation*." The alien nature of goy is further emphasized by the verb havad, *to serve*.

-*great possessions* (rekush): cf. 13.6, "for their *possessions* were so great that they could not dwell together." "To seek from him (God) a straight way for ourselves, our children and all our *goods*" [Ezra 8.21]. The verse at hand refers to Ex 12.36: "And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. Thus they despoiled the Egyptians."

Vs. 15: "Go to your fathers:" the first use of this common expression found, for example, throughout the Book of Kings: "And Rehoboam slept with his fathers and was buried with his fathers in the city of David" [1 Kg 14.31]. The ancestry of Abram was limited compared with later generations; certainly he must have had in mind Noah and before him the generations preceding the flood and hence Adam. Abram's departure is in *peace* or shalom, the first use of this term in the Bible.

-*old age* (seyvah): the first use of this term in the Bible. "A *hoary head* is a crown of glory; it is gained in a righteous life" [Prov 16 31].

Vs. 16: *iniquity* (hawon): that is, belonging to the Amorites; cf. 9.25 to which this verse hearkens back, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers." The iniquity at hand most likely alludes to sexual perversion. This word can also apply to guilt contracted by sinning: "visiting the *iniquity* of the fathers upon the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me" [Ex 20.5].

-such iniquity requires four generations to achieve *completeness* or shalom, the verbal root for shalom noted in vs. 15.

Vs. 17: the second reference to sunset, the first being vs. 12 ("as the sun was going down") or when Abram was overcome with that deep sleep. That is to say, the words addressed to him by God occurred in this special condition reminiscent of when God caused the same deep sleep to fall upon Adam in order to create Eve.

-*dark* (halatah): the only other three references are Ezk 12.6, 7, 12 which refer to Ezekiel going into (symbolic) exile: "I went forth in the *dark*, carrying my outfit upon my shoulder in their sight" [vs. 6]. This term implies not just darkness but one which is thick and impenetrable.

-*smoking fire pot* (tanur): more specifically, "oven," "furnace." "You will make them as a blazing *oven* when you appear" [Ps 21.9].

-*flaming torch* (lapyd): "His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming *torches*" [Dan 10.6].

-Both the fire pot and torch passed between the sacrificial *pieces* or gezer: from a verbal root meaning "to cut," "to divide" and which alternately means "to decree." "To him who divided the Red Sea *in sunder*, for his steadfast love endures forever" [Ps 136.13].

The images presented in the last two verses may be taken to prophesy Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. "And the pillar of cloud moved from before them and stood behind them" in preparation for the Exodus, Ex 14.19. This concluding verse to Chapter Fifteen is made all the more pertinent by vs. 19's references to two rivers, that of Egypt and the Euphrates. The ten peoples mentioned in vss. 19-20 live in between these two rivers. Cf. 1 Kg 4.21 as reference to King Solomon's domain: "Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt." The promise to inherit this region is given in Dt 11.24: "Every place on which the sole of your foot treads shall be yours; your territory shall be from the wilderness

and Lebanon, and from the River, the river Euphrates to the western sea.”

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## Chapter Sixteen

Vs 1: “*bore* him no children:” yalad; the Hebrew text lacks “children.” This conveys a greater sense of desperation with regard to Sarai’s infertility as it opens a new chapter in comparison with the previous chapter’s “To you descendants I give this land” [vs 18].

-*maid* (shiphchah) or Hagar the Egyptian. Cf. 1 Sam 25.41: “Behold, your *handmaid* is a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” Shiphchah is used with ‘amah which more specifically applies to a female slave, so the former term does not necessarily apply to a woman in bondage.

Vs. 2: another use of yalad as with the previous verse, i.e., the Hebrew lacks “children.” Here Sarai attributes her infertility to the Lord who *prevents* (hatsar) her. This verb more specifically means “to shut,” “to detain.” “And he *shut up* the heavens so that there be no rain” [Dt 11.17].

-*obtain children* (banah): this word fundamentally means “to build” as Ezr 4.2: “Let us *build* with you; for we worship your God as you do.”

-“*hearkened to the voice*” (of Sarai): use of shamah and qol to emphasize Abram paying close attention to his wife’s request.

Vs. 3: Note the contrast between Abram having dwelt ten years in Canaan with his becoming husband to Hagar. It may be taken as a temporal way of expressing Sarai’s infertility despite their move to Canaan at God’s bidding. In the verse at hand, Sarai acts as middleman in the sense that she gives Hagar to her husband Abram.

Vs. 4: *came* (bo’): a common word which denotes the sense of entering as in vs. 2 where it applies to sexual intercourse. “Coming” can be taken not so much as the physical act but the whole love-making process which is a kind of “approach” of one spouse to another.

-*saw/conceived*: note the play on words, tahar/tere’, which intimates a unity between them. In the Hebrew text, the word order is reversed; i.e., “conceive” precedes “see.”

-*looked with contempt*: composed of two words in the Hebrew, qalal and hayn or “treat lightly” and “eye.”

-*mistress* (gevereth): the feminine equivalent to gever or *hero*. “An unloved woman when she gets a husband, and a maid when she succeeds her *mistress*” [Prov 30.23].

Vs. 5: Sarai blames her husband for the contempt Hagar had shown her even though she had proposed that Abram get Hagar pregnant.

-*wrong* (chamas): alternately, “oppression.” Cf. 6.11: “Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with *violence*.”

-*embrace* (cheyq): “Let a young maiden be sought for my lord the king, and let her wait upon the king and be his nurse; let her lie in your *bosom*” [1 Kg 1.2].

-“*looked with contempt*”: cf. vs. 4 above with the two Hebrew verbs.

-Just as God is attributed as causing Sarai to be infertile (cf. vs. 2), so he is invoked to judge between the situation brought on by Sarai.

Vs. 6: *power* (yad): literally, “hand.”

-“as you please:” literally, “do to her good in your eyes.”

-*dealt harshly* (hanah): cf. 15.13 for another use of this verb: “and they will be *oppressed* for four hundred years.” Note the similarity of hanah with *eyes* which just preceded it, hayn...as though this harshness sprang directly from Sarai’s eyes (of contempt) towards Hagar.

**Vs. 7: The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur.**

This is the first mention of an *angel* (mal'ak), more specifically, one "of the Lord" perhaps to identify himself clearly. Here is the first such angelic encounter in the Bible. Mal'ak can apply to "messenger" or anyone who has been sent. "Behold, I send an *angel* before you, to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place which I have prepared" [Ex 23.20].

-"*spring* (heyn) of water:" alternately, "eye" due to the resemblance it has with a spring. "For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and *springs*" [Dt 8.7]. This spring is located in the desert at Shur which is also noted in Ex 15.22: "Then Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went into the wilderness of Shur." Perhaps Hagar's presence at Shur intimates her "crossing" the Red Sea which is symbolic of her offspring's destiny which "cannot be numbered for multitude" [vs. 10].

Vs. 8: The angel of the Lord questions Hagar with respect to where she has come and to where she is going. Hagar has no definite place to go; she only says that she is fleeing Sarai.

Vs. 9: The angel of the Lord bids Hagar to return to Sarai and to *submit* (hanah) to her. This verb is the same as in vs. 6 (*dealt harshly*) only in another form. For a similar use of this form, cf. Dan 10.12: "that you have set your mind to understand and *humbled* yourself before your God."

Vs. 10: The reason for Hagar's submission to Sarai is not to resume the abusive treatment she had already experienced but to "greatly *multiply*" (ravah) her descendants. This verb is used twice to signify abundance. -*descendants* (zereh): alternately, "seed" as in 3.15: "between your *seed* and her *seed*." -*counted* (saphar): as in 15.5, "Look toward heaven and *number* the stars, if you are able to number them." In the verse at hand, saphar parallels the promise made to Abram, i.e., innumerable descendants.

**Vs. 11: "Behold, you are with child and shall bear a son; you shall call his name Ishmael; because the Lord has given heed to your affliction."**

This verse resembles Lk 1.31: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

In the verse at hand, we have the beginning of an address by "the angel of the Lord" to Hagar which continues through vs. 12.

*Behold* (hinak): the form hineh with the pronoun -k (*you*) added to it and used as a form of getting one's attention. Cf. 1.29: "*Behold*, I have given you every plant yielding seed." Hagar knew she was pregnant (cf. vs. 5); acknowledgment of this fact by a divine representative or angel indicates that she and her offspring will be blessed.

Ishmael: the name is interpreted as "God hears." 25.12 gives a list of his descendants. Compare the verb shamah (*to hear*) contained within the proper name with *given heed* (also shamah). In other words, the hearing by God of Hagar may be said as having been transferred to her son.

The object of this hearing is Hagar's *affliction* or hony which is prefixed by the preposition 'el (*to, towards*) signifying close attention to her plight. "Seven days you shall eat it with unleavened bread, the bread of *affliction*" [Dt 16.3].

Gal 4.21-31 deals with Hagar and Sarai (or Sarah) in terms of allegorical representation. "Now this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar" [vs. 24]. Actually St. Paul does not mention Sarai; he refers to her as a "free woman" [vs. 30].

**Vs. 12: He shall be a wild ass of a man, his hand against every man and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell over against all his kinsmen."**

The conclusion of the angel's address to Hagar begun in the previous verse. Again, the prophecy about

Ishmael may be compared with Mary's concerning Jesus: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" [Lk 1.32].

*Wild ass* (pere'): A verse which can apply to Ishmael living in the wilderness: "They give drink to every beast of the field; the *wild asses* quench their thirst" [Ps 104.11]. The uncontrollable nature of Hagar's son signified by pere' is heightened by 'adam or *man*, almost as though he were some kind of centaur. The Hebrew could read, "wild ass man."

*Dwell* (yashav): This verb intimates a settled existence, i.e., one opposite the roaming nature of Ishmael and his descendants. At the same time yashav can apply to occupying a given region: "They (again, Ishmael's descendants) *dwelt* (shakan; more properly, "to lie down") from Havilah to Shur which is opposite Egypt in the direction of Assyria; he settled over against all his people" [25.18]. The Hebrew for "settled over" is a verb meaning *to fall* (naphal) which can signify the hostile relationship already noted.

**Vs. 13: So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing;" for she said, "Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?"**

Hagar *calls* (qara') on the Lord's *name* or shem, that is, as distinct from the Lord himself. At the time God did not reveal his proper divine name of YHWH although the Hebrew text uses it. In light of this, perhaps Hagar and those who lived prior to God's revelation of YHWH to Moses had an intimation of this term and alluded to it as "name." Compare with the first mention of this phrase in 12.8: "And there he (Abram) built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord."

The indirect perception of YHWH through shem responds to Hagar's calling. Note the curious words to her by this intermediate shem: "You are a *God of seeing* ('El roy'). As a footnote to the French edition of the **Jerusalem Bible** says, this could be a corruption of "le puits 'du Vivant qui me voit.'" It refers to 24.62: "Now Isaac had come from Beer-la'hai-roi and was dwelling in the Negeb;" also the next verse mentions this place-name. Perhaps roy' (*seeing*) as a noun and translated in English as a gerund (-ing) can signify a chief attribute of God, that of seeing in the sense of beholding; i.e., active and constant.

Hagar's response to this divine roy' is in terms of a question to herself concerning her having *seen* (ra'ah) *God*, that is 'El as opposed to YHWH.

"Alive" and "God" are lacking in the Hebrew text which literally reads, "not have I seen after seeing him?" It is as though Hagar's capacity for seeing remained unchanged before and after her encounter with God. This verse is reminiscent of Ex 33.20: "You cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live." In the Garden of Eden the man and the woman enjoyed intimacy with God yet there is not indication that they "saw" God; rather, they "heard the sound of the Lord God" [3.8]. Perhaps all other forms of address to God by them as well as others can be put in terms of this hearing as opposed to seeing.

**Vs. 14: Therefore the well was called Beer-la'hai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.**

Cf. remarks under the heading of the previous verse with respect to the name of this well. The translation reads, "The well of one who sees and lives," namely Hagar. This verse is similar in meaning to Ex 24.11: "And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God and ate and drank." This is the only occasion where the place name Bered is mentioned; 1 Chron 7.20 has it as a proper name.

Vs. 15 shifts back to Abram, almost as though Hagar had not left him and his wife Sarai. That is to say, Hagar bears him a son whom he names Ishmael, the same Ishmael already noted. First the angel of the Lord communicates to Hagar this name followed by Abram bestowing it upon the child. It is as though both events occurred separately and in different places.

## Chapter Seventeen

**Vs. 1: When Abram was ninety-nine years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.**

An advanced age (99) but considerably shorter than those generations who lived not long after the flood.

*Appeared* (ra’ah): cf. 12.7, “Then the Lord *appeared* to Abram.” Ra’ah was also noted in 16.13: “You are a God of *seeing*...Have I really *seen* God and remained alive after *seeing* him?” Note that this appearance occurs after the birth of Ishmael by Hagar when Abram was 86 years old, that is, 13 years earlier. Therefore Ishmael was well on his way to claiming his personal identity.

*God Almighty* (‘El Shaday): the first revelation of this divine name which later is common throughout the Old Testament. Shaday can refer to any sovereign power and can mean something like “most powerful.” Note the verb shadad (*to treat violently*), but the connection is uncertain. Compare this revelation with the fullness of the divine name’s revelation in Ex 3.14: “I am who am.”

*Walk before* (halak): the common verb for this action here in the hithpael (reflexive) suggesting that in addition to following a divine command, Abram “caused” himself to walk. Such walking is done in God’s presence as a goal towards which Abram moves (“before me”). No special direction is given as in the case of proceeding to a given location.

*Be blameless* (tamam): connotes perfection or completion. The same word is applied to Abram’s predecessor, Noah: “Noah was a righteous man, *blameless* in his generation; Noah walked with God” [6.9].

Vs. 2: The parallel between Abram and Noah is brought out further with the making of a *covenant* (beryth) as in 6.18: “I will establish my *covenant* with you.” Such a covenant is ratified by the two “betweens,” namely, “between me” and “between you.”

-*Multiply* (ravah): as in 16.10 with respect to Ishmael’s descendants, “I will so greatly *multiply* your descendants (etc).” Here the adverb me’od (*exceedingly*) is used; in the former it is lacking although the angel of the Lord said that Ishmael’s offspring “cannot be numbered.”

Vs. 3: an expression of worship (“fell on his face”) or laying prostrate on the ground. Only after having assumed such a position does God speak although vs. 1 has him speaking with Abram in an upright position, as it were. Compare with Moses’ response who removed the sandals from his feet (cf. Ex 3.5). Apparently Moses was unaware that the burning bush was a divine revelation and did not have a response similar to Abram.

**Vs. 4: “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.**

The continuation of God’s address to Abram begun in vs. 1 through vs. 2; resumed in vs. 5 through vs. 8.

Another use of *behold* (hineh) which as noted earlier, can apply to getting one’s attention or making an important statement; the latter is more applicable here.

Cf. 15.18 for first mention of a *covenant* (beryth) with Abram: “On that day the Lord made a *covenant* with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I give this land.” The exact form of this covenant remains unknown until 17.9 where the act of circumcision is introduced for the first time. In the verse at hand, the essence of divine covenant is already present.

The only intimation of this covenant’s fulness is the statement that Abram will be not simply the father of *nations* (goy, singular) but a *multitude* (hamon) of them. In Israel’s history the former term is used concerning hostile nations and those peoples not chosen by God, i.e., “Gentiles.” For Abram to be designated as father of nations means that he is father not simply of the future Israel but of every human family perceived

in terms of this term, an organized political entity.

Hamon suggests noise as in 1 Sam 4.14: "When Eli heard the sound of the outcry he said, 'What is this uproar?'"

Vs. 5: The change of Abram's name to Abraham. Vs. 4 has God saying that Abram *shall be* "father of a multitude of nations," i.e., future tense. Vs. 5 has the same phrase but in the past tense, "For I *have made*..."

Vs. 6: "exceedingly *fruitful*" (parah): often with respect to a woman bearing a child and first used in 1.22: "Be *fruitful* and multiply." In the verse at hand, parah is modified by me'od which as noted elsewhere suggests something excessive; here it has prefixed the preposition b- (*in*) signifying an almost extravagant fertility.

-This verse has two distinctions (lying in the future) with respect to the newly named Abraham: 1) God will make *nations* (goy again) from him, 2) and kings shall *come forth* (yatsa') from him. Yet another mention of Abraham's universality with respect to the human family.

Vs. 7: Another mention of the divine covenant, this time as being *established* (qum) not simply with Abraham but after him; this verb fundamentally means "to rise;" it can apply to an ongoing relationship through the covenant. "But I will *establish* my covenant with you (Noah)" [6.18]. A parallel may be seen between this qum and kings *coming forth* (yatsa').

-Not only is the covenant between God and Abraham but between generations; in the second instance it is *everlasting* (holam). Note its variation in 9.12: "This is the sign of the covenant...that is with you, for all *future* generations."

-Purpose of this covenant: that God is for Abraham (present) and for his descendants (future). Note the three uses of the preposition l- (*to, towards, for*) in the first instance: "*to* you," "*to* God," "*to* your descendants."

Vs. 8: The earlier verses centered around God creating a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. Equivalent to covenant is the possession of Canaan, a definite location; note that Canaan is also an "*everlasting* (holam) possession." Canaan is the land of Abraham's *sojournings* or magur. "Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my *pilgrimage*" [Ps 119.54].

The words "and I will be their God" is not an afterthought by a kind of ratification of the divine presence to Abraham's progeny. The Hebrew text literally reads, "and I will be *to* them *to* God;" another use of the preposition l-.

**Vs. 9: And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations."**

A continuation of God's address to the newly named Abraham which continues through vs. 16 and may be outlined as follows:

-Vs. 9: The words, "And God said to Abraham" follow upon his words begun in vs. 1. This insertion may be taken as a kind of re-enforcement of the importance of what is being communicated here. "As for you" can tie into this notion, for God has already spoken with Abraham about the covenant. Note that God asks him to *keep* (shamar) it, a word often found in Ps 119 with regard to the Torah: "I will *keep* your Law continually, forever and ever" [vs. 44].

-Vs. 10: God presents some specifics regarding the covenant: another mention of "between me and between you" as well as shamar with respect to every male being *circumcised* or mul, the first instance of this physical sign in the Bible. "Christ became a servant to the *circumcised*" [Rom 15.8].

-Vs. 12: The male child is to be circumcised when he is eight days old. "And at the end of eight days when he



was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb" [Lk 2.21]. Note that the covenant given to Abraham was simultaneous with his change of name. With Jesus, his name was bestowed upon him at his circumcision. During the eight days between this event and his birth he remained anonymous, as it were, or unnamed.

-Since Abraham is named "father of a multitude," this title makes more sense as applied to those males "whether born in your house or bought with your money from any foreigner." That is, his paternity extends beyond his immediate physical descendants.

-Vs. 14: Any uncircumcised male is to be *cut off* (karath) from his people. This verb is also used for making ("cutting") a covenant, only used here in the opposite sense. "On that day the Lord *made* a covenant with Abram" [15.18]. In the verse at hand, *nephesh* (*soul*) is used for "he" which can signify the grievous nature of violation of the divine covenant.

-*Broken* (parar): As in Lev 26.15, "...so that you will not do all my commandments, but *break* my covenant."

Vss. 15-21 continue with God speaking, that is, with Abraham, concerning his wife Sarai and his future son Isaac as well as Ishmael which may be outlined as follows:

-Vs. 15: Sarai's name is changed to Sarah which means "princess," a variation of Sarai.

-Vs. 16: The newly named Sarah will become a "mother of *nations* (*goy*)" as well as of kings; use of *goy* suggests that Sarah shares in the universal nature of her husband's paternity.

-Vs. 17: Abraham addresses God saying that he is a hundred years old; compare with his being ninety-nine years old in vs. 1. It is as though a full year had transpired between God's appearance to him and this point.

-Vs. 18: It is interesting that after the impartation of the divine covenant and promise to Sarah Abraham interjects with a petition on Ishmael's behalf whom he bore by Hagar. *In your sight* or the preposition *lepneyka* connotes vision, with God watching Ishmael which parallels vs. 1, "Walk *before* me" (*lepny*), something which Abraham would desire for his son.

-Vs. 19: God declines the request of Abraham with regard to Ishmael; rather, he puts it off until the next verse. God bids Sarah's son is to be called Isaac or "he who laughs." Chapter Seventeen has gone into some detail about the covenant God made with Abraham. This verse has God *establishing* (*qum*; cf. vs. 7) a covenant with Isaac.

-Vs. 20: God returns to Ishmael after an initial rebuff by Abraham. Ishmael will be the "father of twelve princes" who are listed in 25.16+.

-Vs. 20: Even though God establishes a covenant with Ishmael (details are not given), he promises to do the same (*qum*) with Isaac.

Vss. 21-7 or through the end of Chapter Seventeen concern the implementation of the covenant. Vs. 21 has a contrast between God finishing his conversation with Abraham and his going up from him; in other words, a contrast between intimacy with God and his transcendence. The remaining verses relate how Abraham circumcises Ishmael, those of his household as well as himself.

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## Chapter Eighteen

**Vs. 1: And the Lord appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day.**

Compare with 17.1, "...the Lord *appeared* to Abram:" two uses of the verb ra'ah, also 12.7. Note the phrasing; God does not simply "appear" but appears "to him" which intimates a mysterious connection between the two.

"Oaks ('elon) of Mamre:" cf. 12.6 and 13.18. In the first reference, God promises to give the land of Canaan to Abram; in the second, he builds an altar to the Lord. I.e., Abraham was familiar with this location, so God's appearance may have taken place in the context of a sacrifice or the altar he had built at Mamre.

Note the connection between this appearance and Abraham's sitting at the entrance to his tent, possibly to cool himself. This appearance is unusual by reason of not occurring at night, morning nor during the evening; it happens at the least inauspicious time or during the hottest time of day.

Vs. 2: Abraham makes three gestures perhaps due to the heat of the day: lifts up his eyes, *looks* (ra'ah) and *beholds* (hineh). Often hineh is used to get one's attention (cf. 16.11) followed by a seeing or some kind of communication. Again, the unexpected arrival of visitors can be viewed as arousing Abraham from a slumber at this time of day. Abraham's immediate response is to greet these visitors and bow down. Compare his spontaneous greeting during the hottest time of day with that of Adam and Eve during the "cool of the day" or when they hid from God walking in the garden (cf. 3.8). Also, compare the verse at hand with 19.1: "The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth." Both verses are intimated in the following: "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" [Heb 13.1].

Vs. 3: "My *lord*" ('adony): This term is first used in 15.2 with respect to God, "O *Lord* God..." In the verse at hand Abraham applies the singular 'adony to the plural or the three visitors. This plurality becomes a single person in vss. 10 and 13. Apart from any theological interpretation, note that the visitors arrived at the heat of the day when the sun can distort the perception of objects.

-"Found *favor*" (chen): First used in 6.8, "But Noah found *favor* in the eyes of the Lord." Immediately Abraham puts himself in the role of a servant with respect to these visitors, a common practice among desert peoples which is spelled out in vss. 4-5.

Vs. 5: The purpose of Abraham's hospitality is for the three men to *refresh themselves*. The verb sahad is used which connotes a propping up: "and bread to *strengthen* man's heart" [Ps 104.15]. The noun lev (*heart*) is used for *themselves* which can signify not simply the regaining of physical strength during the day's heat but a more comprehensive refreshment.

-A play on words: *pass on* (havar) and *servant* (haved). Certainly Abraham acted like a servant or slave in showing hospitality to the three men.

Vs. 8: After both Abraham and his wife Sarah had gone through fairly involved preparations for a meal, Abraham stood by the three men while they ate. Abraham embodies the sentiment of Lk 17.10, "So when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

Vss. 9-15 pertain to the promise made by the three visitors concerning Sarah giving birth to Isaac in her old age. Some elements may be outlined as follows:

-9: Sarah remains in the tent all the time while Abraham is dealing with his mysterious guests; parallel this with the sentiment of Mary in Jn 11.20: "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him while Mary sat in the house."

-10: Compare the announcement of Sarah bearing a child with the Virgin Mary in Lk 1.31: "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus."

-11: "after the *manner* ('orach) of women:" fundamentally, "path," "manner of life."

-12: *laughed* (tschaq): the verbal root of Sarah's future son, Isaac. For another use, cf. Ex 32.6: "And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to *play*."

-*Pleasure* (hednah): the only use of this word in a sexual context. For another use, cf. Ps 36.9: "And you give them drink from the river of your *delights*."

-14: *hard* (pele'): more accurately, "wonderful." "Who is like you, O Lord...terrible in glorious deeds, doing *wonders*" [Ex 15.11]?

-*Appointed time* (mohed): can also refer to a festival as in 2 Chron 30.22: "So the people ate the food of the *festival* for seven days, sacrificing peace offerings and giving thanks to the Lord the God of their fathers." Note that mohad (*assembly*) is derived from the same verbal root; both nouns intimate a collective recognition of a special time and event.

Vs. 16: The three visitors *set out* (qum) from Abraham, that is, they "arose" which is more significant than a simple departure. I.e., they got up from sitting with Abraham and Sarah and headed towards Sodom, more specifically, they *looked* (shaqaph) in that direction. This verb connotes looking down from a window or a superior height which connects with the sense of qum. "The Lord *looked down* from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any who act wisely, who seek after God" [Ps 14.2].

Vs. 17: Here the Lord muses within himself over whether or not to reveal his intention in the guise of the three visitors concerning Sodom and Gomorrah. Such pondering in the form of an interior question centers around *hiding* (kasah) this intention. This verb was encountered in 7.19: "And the waters prevailed so mightily upon the earth that...all the high mountains under the whole heaven were *covered*."

Vs. 18: Here God continues to muse or think aloud, keeping in mind his promise to Abraham earlier in Chapter 17 with regard to his becoming a great nation. Note the Hebrew text: "in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed." Although the divine promise is made for the future, action seems to shift towards Abraham and the source of this blessing. "All (future) nations" are thereby inserted into him.

Vs. 19: "For I have chosen him:" The Hebrew text has *known* (yadah) for "chosen." Such knowledge (it implies intimate familiarity) is in the past tense indicating that this familiarity had been established.

Yadah has a special purpose with the intent of passing it to Abraham's "children and household:" to *keep* (shamar; cf. 17.9) the *way* (derek) of the Lord. Compare this use of derek with that of 6.12: "For all flesh had corrupted their *way* upon the earth." Such keeping is effected through *righteousness* and *justice*, tsadaqeh and mishpat.

-*Promised* (davar): i.e., the verb "to speak." This second half of vs. 19 indicates the sameness of time; if Abraham's future generations maintain righteousness and justice, they will reflect to him. I.e., both Abraham and these generations seem to lack any temporal and spacial dimensions.

Vs. 20: Here the Lord changes the subject to Sodom and Gomorrah; the verse reads "The Lord said" which is the same as in vs. 17. At the same time the three visitors to Abraham are inserted into this dialogue.

-*Outcry* (zahaqah): several forms exist in the Hebrew, the only other one similar to this being Neh 5.1: "Now there arose a great *outcry* of the people and of their wives against their Jewish brethren." The outcry is against the two cities, source not explicit, but may intimate surrounding areas. It is equivalent with sin which is "very *grave*," the verbal root being kavad (*to be heavy*) in that sin causes a weighing down.

Vs. 21: The Lord says that he will go down to inspect the situation regarding Sodom and Gomorrah. He continues to muse within himself and shares his thoughts with Abraham. His *knowledge* (yadah, verb) is uncertain and depends upon his going there. Perhaps this descending is associated with that of the three visitors who "looked toward Sodom" [vs. 16].

Vs. 22: The three visitors first turned and then headed towards Sodom; compare with vs. 16 when they “set out from there, and they looked toward Sodom.” They did this only after the Lord stated in the previous verse that he would go down to Sodom; note that vs. 22 includes the city of Gomorrah.

-The mysterious interplay between Abraham, the Lord and the three men are enhanced by the words, “but Abraham still stood before the Lord.” I.e., he continued in this attentive position while the men departed. From here until the conclusion of Chapter 18 we have the story of Abraham bargaining with the Lord to spare the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

-Vs. 23: Abraham *drew near* (nagash), that is, to the Lord, in order to commence this bargaining process. Compare with the previous verse, “still stood before the Lord,” which was perhaps some distance. Abraham’s desire is that the Lord does not *destroy* (saphah) the righteous along with the wicked. This verbal root connotes a taking away in the sense of accumulating and then destroying. “But if you still do wickedly, you shall be *swept away*, both you and your king” [1 Sam 12.25]. The righteous are the only ones found in the city of Sodom, rather, they are qarav, at the city’s very center. Compare with *place* or maqom as in vs. 26: “I will spare the whole place for their sake” or for those who are qarav.

In this dialogue the *righteous* (tsadyq) are contrasted with the *wicked* (rashah). “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the *wicked*” [Ps 1.1].

-Vs. 27: Part way through the bargaining process Abraham realizes his mortality before the Lord and claims himself to be *dust* and *ashes* (haphar and ‘epher), words with a similar sound. Haphar: “Then the Lord God formed man of *dust* from the ground” [2.7]. ‘Epher: “Your remembrances are like *ashes*” [Job 13.12].

Abraham haggles with the Lord and gets down to ten persons who are tsadyq in vs. 32. The way God responds “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it” [vs. 32] as following the pattern from the beginning of this dialogue with Abraham shows a kind of indifference, of waiting to see if Abraham will go as low as one tsadyq which he does not.

Vs. 33: After Abraham concludes his dialogue and dares not go below five righteous persons, the Lord went *his way* (ka’asher), literally, “according to which” or according to his divine nature which here means that he disappeared from Abraham’s sight. The situation with Abraham is different: he “returned to his *place* (maqom);” the word here obviously means his dwelling yet can apply to his proper mode of life after having spoken with the Lord which is outside any maqom.

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## Chapter Nineteen

**Vs. 1: The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them and bowed himself with his face to the earth,**

-“In the evening:” implication is that the two angels left Abraham (“from there,” 18.22) and arrived at Sodom the same day. In the meanwhile, Abraham was engaged in a bargaining process with God to save the city (vss. 23-32) beginning with “fifty righteous” and ending with ten. Actually, Chapter 18 concludes without a resolution; God does not say what he will do but “went his way” [vs.33].

*Sitting* (yashav): cf. 2 Sam 19.8: “Behold, the king (David) is *sitting* in the gate;’ and all the people came before the king.” In the verse at hand, Lot was probably killing time while watching people coming into the city before the gate was shut for the night.

Lot makes a twofold gesture upon seeing the two angels: “rose” and “bowed,” which are typical of hospitality for that culture. At the same time he probably perceived their divine origin, that they were different from the usual crowd of people at the gate.

Vs. 2: Lot addresses the two angels as *lords* ('adony), a word of respect which fundamentally means "owner" and frequently applied to God: "Shemer, the *owner* of the hill." It is in contrast to Lot calling himself a servant where he wants them to spend the night. Compare his gesture of hospitality (in a city) with that of Abraham (in a tent, 18.1).

-*Street* (rechov): can apply to an open place as in Ezra 10.9, "And all the people sat in the *open square* before the house of God."

Vs. 3: *Urged* (patsar): the basic meaning is "to beat," "to make blunt." It can also apply to *stubbornness*: "For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and *stubbornness* is as iniquity and idolatry" [1 Sam 15.23]. The intensity of Lot's entreaty is re-enforced by me'od (*strongly*) and the preposition b- ("in them").

Lot made unleavened bread, indicating that he was in haste; compare with the Israelites doing the same prior to their departure from Egypt (cf. Ex 12.39). By way of contrast, Sarah made cakes (cf. 18.6) which required more time. Lot also made a *feast* or mishteh which suggests drinking. "If it please the king, let the king and Haman come this day to a *dinner* that I have prepared" [Est 5.4]. In contrast to the haste implied by leavened bread, "feast" insinuates a leisurely pace.

Vs. 4: The entire population (males, implied from the context) surround Lot's house; most likely they saw him sitting in the city gate receiving the two angels but had no idea as to their identity.

Vs. 5: "that we may *know* (yadah) them" pertains to sexual intimacy, here obviously homosexual. "If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination" [Lev 20.13].

Vs. 6: Lot exits his house ("shuts the door behind him") to address the men surrounding him and perhaps to conceal the identity of his two angelic visitors.

Vs. 7: *act wickedly* (raha): Lot instinctively realizes the intent of the men to "know" his visitors. "He will hide his face from them at that time, because they have *made* their deeds *evil*" [Mic 3.4].

Vs. 8: *known* (yadah) as applied to Lot's two daughters, in contrast to the yadah of vs. 5.

-*Shelter* (tsel): as applied to Lot's house; its proper meaning is "shadow" as Is 16.3: "Make your *shade* like night at the height of noon."

Vs. 9: *will do evil* (raha), as in vs. v.7.

Vs. 11: *blindness* (sanor): an unused Chaldean verb, the only other instance being 2 Kg 6.18: "Elisha prayed to the Lord and said, 'Strike this people, I pray you, with *blindness*.'"

Vs. 13: *outcry* (tsahaqah): usually as applied to a cry for help as in Ex 3.9: "And now, behold, the *cry* of the people of Israel has come to me." In both instances this cry entered the Lord's presence.

Vs. 14: *jesting* (tsahaq): literally, "to laugh." Apparently Lot's two sons-in-law did not realize the divine nature of his visitors in the case of Sodom's inhabitants. For another use of this verb, cf. 39.14: "See, he has brought among us a Hebrew to *insult* us."

Vs. 15: mention of dawn throws into sharp contrast the inhabitants of Sodom outside Lot's house who were struck blind as well as the impending destruction which occurs during the day. The two angels told Lot to escape with his two daughters; no mention is given here of his sons-in-law nor his wife.

-*Punishment* (haon): alternately, "depravity" as in 4.13: "My *punishment* is greater than I can bear."

Vs. 16: *lingered* (mahah): for another use of this verb, cf. Is 29.9: "*Stupefy* yourselves and *be in a stupor*, blind yourselves and be blind!" In the verse at hand, Lot was probably horrified at the blindness of the city's inhabitants and wished to show compassion by offering them his two daughters.

-*Merciful* (chamal): shown towards Lot by the Lord through the mediation of the two angels. "She (Pharaoh's daughter) *took pity* on him (Moses)" [Ex 2.6].

-*Set* (nuach): the second of two actions done to Lot by the angels, the first when they brought him from the city. Implied here is almost a physical picking up and putting Lot down outside Sodom. Nuach also means a putting to rest, of leaving behind.

Vs. 17: the angels (plural, three) bring out Lot and his family followed by a singular person (“he”) telling them to abandon the city.

-“Flee for your life:” literally in Hebrew, “escape on your *soul* (nephesh, singular).” The word for *escape* is malat which means “to be slippery,” that is, something like slipping away undetected.

Vs 18: Lot objects to the (plural) angels about fleeing, claiming that they had shown him favor and kindness. The reason for this objection seems unclear, perhaps due to his age or compassion for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. Compare with the earlier intercession of Abraham (18.23-32) for the same cities. The three angels concede to spare the town of Zoar in vs. 22 which means “Little” in Hebrew.

Vs. 23: this verse sets the stage for the impending disaster by a certain dramatic flair, “The sun had risen on the earth when Lot came to Zoar.”

Vs. 24: *brimstone* (gaphryth): related to gopher (*pitch*). “For the Lord has a day of vengeance...And the streams of Edom shall be turned into *pitch* and her soil into *brimstone*” [Is 34.8-9]. In the verse at hand, there are two “*froms* (min):” “*from* the Lord” and “*out of* heaven.”

Vs. 25: Divine use of fire and brimstone cause Sodom and Gomorrah to be *overthrown* or haphak, a verb which connotes a turning upside down. “I *overthrew* some of you, as when God *overthrew* Sodom and Gomorrah, and you were as a brand plucked out of the burning; yet you did not return to me” [Am 4.7].

Vs. 26: Lot’s wife *looked back* (navat); this verb does not necessarily apply to the act of turning around and then looking; it involves more a beholding or a comprehensive gaze. Note her position “behind him (Lot).”

-*Pillar* (natsyv): can also refer to a statue or a military *garrison*. “And he (David) put *garrisons* in Edom” [2 Sam 8.14].

Vs. 27: The narrative quickly shifts back to Abraham, “where he stood before the Lord,” that is, as recounted in 18.16, the place he had first encountered the three visitors. Contrast how they “set out from there” with the destroyed cities. This *place* (maqom) is also where Abraham had bargained with the Lord to spare Sodom.

Vs. 28: Abraham *looked down* (shaqaph) towards Sodom and Gomorrah. Compare its use in 18.16 where “the men...*looked* toward Sodom.” What Abraham saw was the result of divine fire and brimstone.

-*Smoke* (qytor): from a verbal root which applies to the burning of incense. “Fire and hail, snow and *frost*, stormy wind fulfilling his command” [Ps 148.8]! “Frost” here can suggest a mist or vapor-like condition which pervades the atmosphere. In the verse at hand, it is associated with a *furnace* or kivshan, more specifically, used for melting metal. “Take handfuls of ashes from the *kiln* and let Moses throw them toward heaven in the sight of Pharaoh” [Ex 9.8].

Vs. 29: *Remembered* (zakar). Such remembrance assumes greater significance in light of the destroyed cities and is reminiscent of 8.1: “But God *remembered* Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark.” The deliverance of both men and their families stands out in light of pervasive destruction. The same *zakar* applies to Lot and assumes a more dramatic air: “and sent Lot *out of the midst* (mitok, i.e., the very center) of the overthrow.”

Vs. 30: Lot went up from Zoar, that is, he exited the valley in which the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were located; parallel this ascent with the (supposed) high ground from which Abraham viewed the destruction.

Vss. 30-8 or to the end of Chapter Twenty presents a story explaining the origin of the Moabites and Ammonites, Israel’s neighbors, with which it engaged in frequent conflict. Perhaps the offspring resulting from the incestuous union of Lot and his two daughters are a way of putting down these two tribes. Compare this

with the prohibition against such illicit action in Lev 18.6-18 or in terms of the “uncovering of nakedness.”

Vs. 38: “He (Ben-ammi) is the father of the Ammonites to this day.” A way of stating that the incestuous relationship of the two daughters with their father Lot persists from that time until the present.

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## Chapter Twenty

This chapter recounts the sojourn of Abraham and Sarah in Gerar which parallels that of 12.10-20 when both were in Egypt.

Vs. 1: *sojourn* (gur): used in 12.10, “So Abram went down to Egypt to *sojourn* there, for the famine was severe in the land.” This verb connotes a turning aside in the sense of diverting from one’s path. The author of Hebrews has this in mind when speaking of Abraham: “By faith he *sojourned* in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.”

Vs. 2: God appeared (i.e., “came”) to Abimelech, the king of Gerar, in a *dream* or *chalom*. This is the first mention of such a divine communication which perhaps signifies even further distance from God’s immediate presence in the Garden of Eden. Note that this dream which occurs “at night comes to a non-Hebrew.

Vs. 4: *approach* (qarav): Abimelech to Sarah, i.e., to have sexual relations. The same verb but in another context is found in 19.23: “Then Abraham *drew near* and said, ‘Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?’”

Vs. 4: Abimelech is innocent because he mistook Sarah for Abraham’s sister which was what Abraham claimed her to be. When addressing the Lord Abimelech associates his mistaken transgression with “an *innocent* (tsadeyq) people,” an adjective which also means “just, right.” “Acquitting the *innocent* and condemning the guilty” [Dt 25.1]. Note the close association of Abimelech with “people” which he wishes the Lord to spare. This verse is reminiscent of Abram’s plea with God in 18.23-32, perhaps wishing to avoid the same fate as Sodom and Gomorrah.

Vs. 5: Abimelech states his innocence: “*integrity* (tam) of heart” and “*innocence* (niqayon) of my heart.” The former connotes wholeness and moral integrity. Cf. another implication: “Jacob was an *upright* man, dwelling in tents” [25.27]. The latter derives from the verbal root naqah, *to be clean*. “I wash my hands in *innocence* and go about your altar, O Lord” [Ps 26.6].

Vs. 6: God continues to speak in this dream-dialogue to say that he realized Abimelech’s integrity and innocence and therefore protected him. God gives a more complete or definitive response than in the bargaining process with Abraham over Sodom and Gomorrah.

Vs. 7: *prophet* (navey’): the first mention of this term (pertaining to Abraham). It seems to be of the same genre, if you will, as the nature of a dream in vs. 1. That is, prophet/dream are means of communication from God to humanity which intimates distance or some alienation by reason of their considerable narrowing down of this communication to one or several persons.

-*Pray* (palal): along with dream and prophet, the first mention of this term in the Bible. I.e., it is another indication of that more distant relationship between God and humanity. The notion of this verbal root is “to judge,” “to supplicate” which again parallels Abraham’s bargaining with God. “And I *prayed* for Aaron at the same time” [Dt. 9.20].

-“You and all that are yours:” God says these words to Abimelech, threatening him with death if he doesn’t restore Sarah to Abraham. Compare this social connection between the individual and community as in vs. 4.

Vs. 8: *rose early* (shakam): a verb often employed in the context of Abimelech’s dream or to indicate that a significant event is about to occur. “And he (Moses) *rose early* in the morning and built an altar at the foot of

the mountain" [Ex 24.4].

-*Spoke* (davar)/*things* (devarym): the latter derives from same verbal root which denotes a close connection between speaker and spoken. The Hebrew adds to the vividness: "in their ears." The servants to whom Abimelech spoke were "very much afraid," that is, they intimated the same fate recounted in vss. 4 & 7.

Vs. 10: *thinking of* (ra'ah): the verb is "to see," here applied to Abraham's misleading of Abimelech. For another use of this verb in the same context, cf. 2 Sam 18.27: "I *think* the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok."

Vs. 11: "*fear* (yire'ah) of God:" along with dream, prophet and pray, the first biblical association of fear with God which better means reverence. "The *fear* of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" [Prov 1.7]. Abraham associates such fear with a specific location, "in this *place* (maqom)," namely, Abimelech's kingdom of Gerar.

Vs. 13: *caused to wander* (tahah). The verb is in the hiphil indicating that an agent other than Abraham effected this; i.e., an indirect action by God which is more subtle than effecting it outrightly. Reference goes back to 12.1, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house" to which Sarah was an accomplice, if you will. This is the first time Abraham associated his divine call with wandering.

-*Kindness* (chesed): attributed to Sarah and often connected with divine mercy. Cf. 19.19: "Behold, your servant has found *favor* in your sight."

Vs. 16: *vindication* (kesuth): the only use of this term in the Old Testament; most likely it means "veil" or "covering." Reference is to the thousand pieces of silver in addition to Abimelech's land of Gerar (vs. 15). Note that both the kesuth and his land are lipeny: "*before you*" as in the preceding verse and lipeny with respect everyone in Abraham's company.

-*Righted* (yakach): the only use of this verb within such a context; it has the fundamental meaning of "to argue," "to judge." "But with righteousness he shall *judge* (shaphat) the poor and *decide* with equity for the meek of the earth" [Is 11.4].

Vs. 17: *prayed* (palal): cf. vs. 7 where this verb was used for the first time, that is, in a Abimelech's dream with reference to Abraham doing the palal. Here the immediate consequence of palal is *healing* or rapha', the first mention of a divine cure. "And understand with their hearts and turn and be *healed*" [Is 6.10].

Vs. 18: *shut* (hatsar): used twice, the second verb being infinite absolute, to show the complete cessation of propagation in Abimelech's household and therefore his descendants. Cf. 16.2: "The Lord has *prevented* me (Sarai) from bearing children."

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## Chapter Twenty-One

Vs. 1: *visited* (paqad): the first time this verb is used, later frequently employed, when the Lord makes contact with people. In the verse at hand, paqad is used in the context of Sarah becoming pregnant. "And the Lord *visited* Hannah, and she conceived" [1 Sam 2.21].

-*Promised* (davar): the fundamental meaning of this verb is "to speak." The context is 18.14: "At the appointed time I will return to you, in the spring, and Sarah shall have a son." For another verse with this meaning of davar, cf. Ex 12.25: "When you come to the land which the Lord will give you, as he has *promised*, you shall keep this service."

Vs. 2: *time* (mohed): as in 18.14 as noted in the previous verse, "At the *appointed time*."

-*Spoken* (davar): compare with its use as "promise" in vs. 1.

Vs. 3: Note the wording: "who was born to him" and "whom Sarah bore him (Isaac)." The first can apply to that indirect operation of the Lord and the second to the more immediate act of giving birth.



Vs. 4: *circumcised* (mul): This verse hearkens back to 17.10, “Every male among you shall be *circumcised*.”

-“Eight days old.” again, cf. 17.12. Most likely this time between birth and circumcision was added later. Also, keep in mind the six days of creation and the seventh day of rest.

Vs. 6: *laughter* (tsechoq). The only use of this noun in the Old Testament (it forms the root of the proper name Isaac) which hearkens back to 18.12, i.e., the same verbal root: “Sarah *laughed* to herself.” There it was as a result of the three visitors; here God is the agent (“made”). The laughter of which Sarah speaks is not derisive but one of joy.

Vs. 8: “grew and weaned.” Cf. Lk 2.52, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”

Vs. 9: *playing* (tsachaq). The Hebrew text lacks “with her (Hagar) son Isaac.” Note the use of the same verbal root regarding tsechoq in vs. 6.

Vs. 10: *cast out* (garash). The same verb as in 3.24, almost as though Sarah wished that the same fate done to Adam be imposed upon Hagar and her son: “He *drove out* the man.”

Vs. 11: *displeasing* (yarah). Alternately, “to be evil, injurious.” “But God was *displeased* with this thing, and he smote Israel” [1 Chron 21.7].

Vs. 12: God bids Abraham not to be yarah but to obey Sarah instead because he has in mind Isaac as the source of Abraham’s descendants. The Hebrew text literally reads, “in Isaac will be called to you *descendant* (zereh).” This divine promise has its roots in 12.7: “To your *descendants* I will give this land.”

Vs. 13: *nation* (goy). As in imitation of 12.2, “And I will make of you a great *nation*.” There God speaks to Abraham as he sends him forth from his native land, not unlike Abraham’s dismissal of Hagar and her son only with different consequences. Still, Ishmael is of Abraham’s *seed* (zereh; cf. previous verse).

Vs. 15: *wandered* (tahah). Compare with Abraham’s tahah in 13, i.e., “When God *caused* me to *wander*.”  
-Beer-sheba: the place where Hagar and her child wandered; it receives this proper name later in vss. 30-1.  
Compare Hagar’s wandering with Elijah’s flight from Jezebel: “Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life and came to Beer-sheba” [1 Kg 19.4].

Vs. 16: Compare Hagar’s position (“she sat over against him”) with that of Jonah awaiting the destruction of Nineveh, “Then Jonah went out of the city and sat to the east of the city and made a booth for himself there. He sat under it in the shade until he should see what would become of the city” [Jon 4.5]. That is to say, both Hagar and Jonah await a dreaded end which turns out otherwise.

-The Hebrew text has “she lifted up her voice” as opposed to the English, “the child lifted up his voice.”

Vs. 17: God hears the “voice of the *lad* (nahar),” i.e., not Hagar’s voice as in the preceding verse. Nahar is used both of a new-born child as well as up to around the age of twenty. Compare with *child* in vs. 14 or yeled which can apply to someone recently born.

-Note that God heard the lad’s voice but his angel called to Hagar from heaven.

-“What troubles you” in Hebrew literally reads, “What to you.”

-“The voice of the lad where he is:” that is, “under one of the bushes” of vs. 15. Compare with Ex 3.4: “God called to him (Moses) out of the bush.” Also compare “where he is” with God’s angel in heaven or the two different locales.

Vs. 18: “I will make him a great *nation* (goy)” or to counter 12.2 as noted under vs. 13. Here the “I” is the angel speaking God’s voice, as it were.

Vs. 19: After the angel spoke to Hagar, God himself *opened* (paqach) her eyes to behold a well of water, the same verb used in 3.7, “Then the eyes of both were *opened*, and they knew that they were naked.” Another

use is Is 42.7: “to *open* the eyes that are blind.” In the verse at hand, Hagar saw the well which apparently was close by without her realizing it.

Vs. 20: “And God was with the lad.” Not only this but when “he *grew up*” (*gadal*), a verb also meaning “to become great.” Compare with vs. 8, “And the child (Isaac) *grew*” which, along with the verse at hand, has a parallel to Lk 2.52.

-Ishmael “*became an expert* (*ravah*) with the bow,” a verb matching the sense of *gadal*.

-Hagar obtains a wife for Ishmael from Egypt; compare with Abraham sending his servant to “my kindred” [24.4] to obtain a wife for his son Isaac, that is, from Ur of the Chaldeans, 11.31.

Vss. 21-34 describe Abraham’s dispute with Abimelech and offers two explanations for the proper name Beer-sheba. The first is “well of the oath” based upon Abraham’s words, “I will *swear* (*shavah*).”

Vs. 23: Abimelech asks Abraham to make a three-fold oath (“swear”): to himself, his *offspring* (*nyn*) and his *posterity* (*neked*). *Nyn* has only two other references, Job 18.19 and Is 14.22. *Neked* is found one other time in conjunction with Is 14.22.

-*Loyally* (*chesed*). Literally, “according to mercy.” Abimelech wishes Abraham to act thus not only towards himself but towards the *land* (*‘ertz*) of his sojourning, thereby showing the close relationship between it and the inhabitants.

Vs. 27: *took* (*yatsav*). That is, with respect to seven ewe lambs. This verb connotes a placing or standing, so these animals are not simply taken but *set apart* (cf. vs. 28).

-*Covenant* (*beryth*). The third one thus far, the first being with Noah and the second being with Abram. On the other hand, this covenant is the first one made between two human beings instead of between a person and God.

Vs. 30: *witness* (*hedah*). “My soul keeps your *testimonies*” [Ps 119.167]. In the verse at hand, Abraham claims to have dug the well. Cf. vs. 19 where Hagar beholds the same well already dug.

Vs. 31: the second explanation of the proper name Beer-sheba, “Well of the Oath” which in the following verse is ratified by a covenant.

Vs. 33: *tamarisk tree* (*‘eshel*) or a small shrub with tiny scale-like leaves. Two other references, both concerning King Saul. The first (1 Sam 22.6) has him sitting under a tamarisk prior to the massacre of the priests of Nob. The second is in 31.13 where his body and that his sons were buried (in Jabesh).

-After having planted the tamarisk tree, Abraham calls on the Lord’s name, literally, “in the name of the Lord” who is also identified as the *Everlasting God* or ‘El Holam. “The Lord is the *everlasting God*, the Creator of the ends of the earth” [Is 40.28].

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## Chapter Twenty-Two

Vs. 1: “After these things:” in references to the events of the preceding chapter. Now God *tests* (*nasah*) Abraham, as though what he had experienced was not enough. “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you...that I may *prove* them, whether they will walk in my law or not” [Ex 16.4]. Abraham’s immediate response to God calling his name is “*Here* (*hineh*) am I,” this word suggesting a beholding or immediate awareness of the situation at hand.

Vs. 2: God not only calls Isaac, Abraham’s, son but adds the two following: 1) his *only son* or *yachyd*, which impends the sacrifice to follow. 2) “whom you *love* (*‘ahav*).” “When I was a son with my father, tender, the *only one* in the sight of my mother” [Prov 4.3].

-Moriah: unknown but identified with Jerusalem. “Then Solomon began to build the house of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah where the Lord had appeared to David his father” [2 Chron 3.1]. The beginning of

this “test” of Abraham has him yet going into a second exile, as it were, after God bade him to leave his native land.

-*Offer* (halah) and *burnt offering* (holah), the same verb, here with reference to Isaac. For a previous use of this pair, cf. 8.20, “Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar.”

-God tells Abraham to go to “one of the mountains” in Moriah, i.e., not designated yet vs. 9 speaks of a specific *place* (maqom), thereby intimating that Abraham realized the appropriate place when he arrived there: “of which I shall tell you.”

Vs. 3: “Abraham rose early in the morning.” As used in 20.8 and 21.14, a mode of expression which sets the stage for a momentous action that will happen in the course of the day. Abraham also takes “two young men” yet leaves them behind as he and Isaac ascend the mountain. Perhaps they were unaware of the precise mountain in Moriah God revealed to father and son; also they are not mentioned after the aborted sacrifice of Isaac. “Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death” [Ex 19.12].

-*Place* (maqom) or the particular mountain in Moriah again mentioned in vs. 9. A parallel may be drawn between this place and the mountain of Sinai which God revealed to Moses. In the former, a sacrifice was intended to be offered on the summit. The latter has no sacrifice, but God gave Moses instructions as to its performance.

Vs. 4: the *place*/maqom is made all the more dramatic by “lifted up his eyes” as well as “afar off.” Thus God seemed to reveal to Abraham the spot en route or during his three days’ journey. These words “lifted up his eyes” can signify that Abraham had his head bowed down to the ground either in weariness or concern or in following the trail before his feet.

Vs. 5: “stay with the ass:” reminiscent again of Mt. Sinai, the quote of Ex 19.12 under vs. 3 to which may be added vs. 4, “No hand shall touch it, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.”

-*Worship* (shachah): the first mention of this gesture in the Bible; it is a common one accompanied by prostrating oneself. “Since he is your lord, bow to him” [Ps 45.11]. Such worship is done “yonder” or again keeping in mind the Sinai image, apart from the common people.

-“and come again to you:” signifying a certain tension or expectation among the two young men as they await the outcome of the sacrifice.

Vs. 7: Abraham lays the wood for the sacrificial fire on Isaac which he had already cut in vs. 3. Perhaps the mountain on which the sacrifice was to take place lacked wood.

-“So they went both of them together:” words which heighten the drama and made more tense by allowing the reader to intimate what was going through the mind of Isaac.

Vs. 8: “My father!” Words addressed to Abraham not unlike God saying in vs. 1, “Abraham!” Abraham responds like he did to God’s words in that verse, “Here (hineh, a variation of this word) I am!” which parallels the hineh in vs. 1. Isaac uses hineh with respect to the sacrificial fire and wood.

-*Lamb* (seh): first mention of this animal, that is, for a sacrifice. “They shall take a *lamb* according to their fathers’ house, a lamb for a household” [Ex 12.3].

-*Will provide* (ra’ah): literally, “will see;” cf. vs. 14 below. The drama of this providing in the future is intensified by “they went both of them together.” This dialogue occurs while Abraham and Isaac were ascending the mountain.

Vs. 9: *Came* (bo’): in the sense of coming to a place, not necessarily ascending (the mountain) which can signify that Abraham and Isaac were already at the summit and needed “to enter” or be more fully within the *place* or maqom “which God told him.”

This verse has four actions:

1) “built an *altar* (mizbeach).” The first one was constructed by Noah after the flood (cf. 8.20). Perhaps Abraham was thinking of the altar he built in 12.7, “So he built there an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him.” This one was in response to God’s words, “To your descendants I will give this land,” words

which may have struck Abraham at Moriah as having a certain irony.

- 2) "*laid* the wood *in order* (harak)." "And *lay* wood *in order* upon the fire" [Lev 1.7].
- 3) "*bound* (haqad) Isaac." The only use of this verb in the Old Testament.
- 4) laid Isaac not only upon the altar but upon the wood.

Vs. 10: First Abraham "puts forth his hand" which signifies preparation and allows the reader to guess what was going on in his mind. Next he takes the *knife* or ma'akalath "to slay (shachat) his son," this verb having the sense of bringing about destruction or ruin as opposed to readying a sacrificial victim. "They *slew* the sons of Zedekaih before his eyes" [2 Kg 26.7]. The Hebrew word for "knife" as used here and in vs. 6 is an instrument used for eating. "There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are *knives*, to devour the poor from off the earth" [Prov 30.14].

Vs. 11: Here the "angel of the Lord" calls to Abraham from heaven which parallels his response to God in vs. 1. He continues to speak through vs. 12 for the first of two times, the second being vs. 15-18. There the proper name "Abraham" was used once whereas here it is used twice. That is, in the latter to make him refrain from slaying Isaac. Perhaps the angel is employed to signify a more direct intervention, to restrain Abraham's hand which held the knife. Abraham responded with yet another hineh, "*Here am I!*"

Vs. 12: "Do not *lay* your hand on the lad:" the same verb (shalak) as used in vs. 10, "Abraham *put forth* his hand."

-"*Fear* (yare') God." The first mention of this phrase which later becomes important in biblical theology as in Dt 10.20, "You shall *fear* the Lord your God; you shall serve him and cleave to him, and by his name you shall swear." In the verse at hand, such fear is bound up with Abraham's readiness which hearkens back to his "Here am I" of vs. 1.

-*Withhold* (chasak). Compare with the opposite or refraining gesture of shalak in the preceding verse.

Abraham's willingness not to withhold the sacrifice of his son is again heightened by yachyd (*only son*) as in vs. 2.

-"*From me.*" Obviously with respect to the Lord but communicated through the angel almost as if he were speaking as the Lord.

Vs. 13: "lifted his eyes." Compare this preoccupation with the event unfolding with the same in vs. 4 where Abraham was en route to the mountain in Moriah.

-*Ram* ('ayl). This animal was among several other types which Abram offered in 15.9 when the Lord promised to give him the land to possess. Similarly but in more dramatic fashion, Abraham "possesses" in a new way his son Isaac.

-The ram is *offered* (halah) as a *burnt offering* (holah); cf. vs. 2.

Vs. 14: another mention of the mountain as "that *place*" or maqom, better, one of the unidentified mountains of the region which tradition later calls Jerusalem.

-Abraham names the maqom *The Lord will provide* or YHWH yire'eh or "The Lord will see." I.e., the verb is in the future which can apply to the Lord not only looking out for Isaac's safety on the mountain but for that of future generations.

-"*To this day:*" continuation of what transpired with Abraham into the present.

-"*On the mount of the Lord:*" first part of the newly named maqom where YHWH takes possession of it.

-"*It shall be provided*" or "*He will be seen.*" Note the different forms of the same verb yare' (*to see*): future where the Lord will do the seeing and future passive where he will be seen which can infer through indirect means.

Vs. 15: the second of two times when the angel speaks to Abraham, the first being in conjunction with his preventing Abraham from offering Isaac. As in both cases, he speaks "from heaven" to show the transcendence of God vis-a-vis even a holy maqom as the mountain in Moriah.

Vs. 16: The angel speaks "as if" he were the Lord ("says the Lord"), namely, "by myself I have sworn."

Vs. 17: Two future promises by the angel/Lord: *bless* (barak) and *multiply* (ravah) which are reminiscent of

15.5, “Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them...so shall your descendants be.” Here God does the speaking compared with the angel in the verse at hand.

–“Obeyed my voice.” Abraham carried out the divine command to sacrifice Isaac through *hearing*, but it was effected on the mountains where “He will be *seen*.”

Vs. 18: Abraham returns to the two young men who accompanied him but were not present on the mountain, again, similar to Moses. Note that the text does not mention Isaac.

Vss. 19-20 conclude this chapter by presenting an Aramean genealogy of Rebekah’s father, Bethuel, future wife of Isaac (cf. chapter 24). Vs. 19 begins the genealogy by “It was told to Abraham;” no mention of whether such telling was human or divine.

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### Notes on the Book of Genesis, Part III (Chapters 23-50)

This is the third and final Part to the **Notes** which goes to the conclusion of the Book of Genesis.

#### Chapter Twenty-Three

Vs. 1: This chapter begins with the death of Abraham’s wife, Sarah, and the purchase of a family burial place. The story is important in that it shows Abraham as a foreigner who was able to establish a secure residence in an alien land.

–Sarah lived 127 years; the second half of this verse expresses this almost by way of emphasis, “these were the years of the life of Sarah.”

Vs. 2: Kiriath-arba: “that is, Hebron” or the older name, “City of the Arba.” This place was promised to Caleb by Moses which Joshua gives him as noted in Jos 14.15.

Vs. 3: After mourning for Sarah, Abraham seeks to purchase a burial plot. The Hebrew is vivid: “And Abraham rose from on the face his dead.” It was as though Abraham had his face on that of Sarah to show their intimacy both in life and death.

Vs. 4: Abraham says to the Hittites or inhabitants of Canaan that he is both a *stranger* (*ger*) and *sojourner* (*toshav*) among them. *Ger* was first encountered in 15.13 where God applies this term to the future dwelling of the Israelites in Egypt until their departure.

–Toshav: first use of this term, from the verbal root *yashav*, *to dwell*, and intimates a more permanent residence. “For I am your passing guest, a *sojourner*, like all my father” [Ps 39.12].

–*Property* (*achuzah*): in the sense of “possession” as related to the verbal root. Note that this property is “among you” just like Abraham being a stranger and sojourner “among you.” Cf. 40.30 in reference to the burial place of Jacob.

–“Out of my sight:” perhaps that Abraham might not be reminded of Sarah since he is among an alien people, and the sight of this tomb would cause him further grief.

Vs. 6: Two titles the Hittites attribute to Abraham: *my lord* (*‘adony*) and *mighty prince* (*nesy’ ‘elohym*). The first was used with respect to the two angels who came to Sodom (12.2) and is a common address to God instead of YHWH. In Hebrew, the second reads “prince of God.” Refer to 17.20 where *nesy’* is applied to Ishmael as “father of twelve *princes*.” Perhaps the Hittites use the second term of address from having heard about his attempted sacrifice of Isaac recounted towards the end of in the previous chapter.

–“Among us:” that is, being a lord and mighty prince; the third use of this preposition, the first two being noted in vs. 4.

Vs. 7: “People of the *land* (*‘eretz*):” a term later used to show the identity between Israel and the physical land

which here intimates a similar bond between the land and the native Hittites. Abraham bids them or in the Hebrew, “your *souls*” (nephesh), to entreat Ephron for a burial place.

-Abraham has his eyes set on the cave of Machpelah in possession of Ephron, again, the place where Jacob will be buried (cf. 50.13). Further mention of ‘achuzah (*possession*) can represent that this is a stable place in an alien land, almost like a monument, which Israel will later possess.

Vs. 10: Ephron “was sitting *among* (betok; also, ‘in the midst of’) the Hittites” which can indicate his relative importance as well as creating a certain drama when Abraham approaches him with his request to purchase the cave. The transaction occurs at the city gate where all such business was handled. “And Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there; and behold, the next of kin, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by” [Rt 4.1].

Vs. 11: Ephron immediately grants Abraham’s request. Perhaps he realized that Abraham was a “lord” and “mighty prince” (vs. 6) and thus favored by God after the incident when he attempted to sacrifice his son Isaac.

Vs. 12: “People of the *land*’ (‘eret), as in vs. 7, to whom Abraham shows respect.

Vs. 17: After Abraham paid full price for the field of Ephron in Machpelah, it *was made over* or qum. This verb fundamentally means “to rise” but can apply to the establishment of anything as well as its endurance, its capacity to “rise,” as it were, well into the future.

Vs. 18: *Possession* (miqneh): from a verbal root meaning “to acquire” with the connotation of wealth. Compare with ‘achuzah of vss. 4 & 7.

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## Chapter Twenty-Four

This lengthy chapter (67 verses) tells the story of Abraham obtaining a wife (Rebekah) for his son Isaac. Isaac was about to be offered as a sacrifice to God, yet Abraham “received him back” [Heb 11.17]. With this “return” it is interesting to consider the role of Rebekah as his wife who, in a sense, participated in this “receiving.”

Vs. 1: “Well advanced in years:” in the Hebrew text it literally reads, “he came in years.”

Vs. 2: *Oldest* (zeqan): in reference to Abraham’s senior servant, presumably Eliezar of Damascus, to whom Abraham could have bestowed his inheritance as recounted in 15.2. Compare zeqan with Abraham being *old* (zeqen) in vs. 1.

-*Had charge* (mashal): a word signifying dominion and full authority. Mashal also means “to be like,” the connection perhaps suggestive of assimilation between the person in charge and those over whom he exerts authority. Thus Eliezar presumably had considerable power over Abraham’s possessions. He places his hand under the thigh of Abraham, symbolic of reproduction, thereby enhancing the mashal already in his control. Israel/Jacob does the same with his son Joseph in 47.29, that is, with respect to the promise not to bury him in Egypt.

Vs. 3: Abraham bids his servant not to obtain a Canaanite woman to be a wife for his son Isaac. Compare this sense of alienation, of being a stranger and exile (cf. 23.4) with Israel/Jacob not wishing to be buried in Egypt despite the kind disposition by residents towards him and his family. The oath is by “the Lord, the God of heaven and of the earth” which includes not only the land of the Canaanites (‘among whom I dwell’) but all peoples.

Vs. 4: The servant, not Abraham, returns to his “country and kindred” to get a wife for Isaac. I.e., the exile of Abraham cannot be violated. Still another parallel can be made here between Israel/Jacob and Joseph in Egypt.

Vss. 5-6 apply this sense of a one-way exile—with no prospect of no return—to Isaac as well.

Vs. 7: In vs. 3 Abraham makes his servant swear by the “Lord, the God of heaven and of the earth.” Here he speaks of “the Lord, the God of heaven,” i.e., not of earth, as having brought him into Canaan. The Lord swore this promise to Abraham which was probably in his mind when he made the servant swear an oath to him in vs. 3.

-“His *angel* (mal’ak).” Two references: 1) “the *angel* of the Lord” in 16.7 who did not interact with Abraham but saved Hagar and her son in the desert after Abraham’s wife Sarah cast them out. 2) also in 22.11, the angel who restrained Abraham from sacrificing Isaac.

Vs.10: “City of Nahor:” first mentioned in 11.22 when listing the descendants of Shem after the flood and grandfather of Abraham (cf. 11.25-6); also listed in Christ’s genealogy, Lk 3.34.

Vs. 11: “Time of evening” is here equivalent to when “women go out to draw water.” Refer back to 3.8 when God was walking in the garden at the “cool of the day.” Also Ex 2.16 has Moses by a well after he fled to Midian, a place used by local shepherds. It was an occasion for Moses to marry Zipporah, Jethro’s daughter.

Vs. 12: Upon seeing the women at the well the servant instinctively knows that it is the opportunity (‘today’ or better, the evening) to make his move. Before this he beseeches God with a two-fold request: 1) *success* or *qarah* lephaney which literally reads in Hebrew, “call (I beseech) before me.” 2) *steadfast love* or *chesed* as in 21.23, “but as I have dealt *loyally* with you.”

Vs. 14: The servant asks God that the destined wife for Isaac be the woman who offers water to him and his camels. That is, this woman will be the one *appointed* or *yakach*, alternately as “to argue,” “reprove.” This verse is the only one with such a meaning. In the verse at hand *yakach* is related to the divine *chesed* (also mentioned here) towards Abraham. Thus the same *chesed* applies through Abraham to his son Abraham and through Rebekah.

Vs. 15: “Before he had done speaking:” that is, speaking with God. As a consequence, Rebekah immediately comes to the servant. The image of a woman approaching with a water jar on her shoulder at evening is highly suggestive of her beauty which the evening twilight tended to obscure, making it all the more mysterious.

Vs. 16: Rebekah is a *virgin* or *betulah* which can also apply to a newly married woman as in Jl 1.8: “Lament like a *virgin* girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.” Since it was evening, the servant could still see that she was “very *fair*” (*tov*) which also means “good.”

-*Known* (*yadah*): that is, not having had sexual intercourse.

Vs. 18: Rebekah now places the jar which had been on her shoulder on her hand in order that the servant may take a drink of water, a fact which further enhances her beauty during this time of evening twilight.

Vs. 21: The servant *gazes* (*sha’ah*) at Rebekah, the only use of this word which fundamentally means “to lay waste.” He does this *in silence* or *charash*, a verb alternately meaning “to plow,” “to cut.” “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall *keep quiet*” [Ex 14.14].

-The servant maintained his quiet gaze at Rebekah in order to *learn* (*yadah*) “whether the Lord had *prospered* (*tsalach*) his journey or not.” “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over him who *prosper* in his way” [Ps 37.7].

Vs. 23: Although the servant recognized the woman intended to be Isaac’s bride (vs. 15), he did not know her name. In the verse at hand he asks her for room (‘for us’) to spend the night. The first person plural could refer to the servant and his camels or perhaps to those who accompanied him; they are not mentioned until vs. 32 (‘the feet of the men who were with him’).

Vs. 24: The maiden does not disclose her name (Rebekah) but presents it in terms of her being “daughter of Bethuel, the son of Milcah” which for the servant is the indication that she is the one whom he had been looking for. That is, Rebekah identifies herself as belonging to the same family as Abraham.

Vs. 27: The servant acknowledges God's favor towards Abraham: he showed *chesed* and *'emeth* (*faithfulness*).

Vs. 30: Rebekah's brother Laban saw the ring and bracelets on her and instinctively knew that the servant was sent by God: "Come in, O blessed of the Lord" [vs. 31].

Vs. 33: The servant tells Laban and Bethuel about his mission which in Hebrew literally reads, "I will not eat until I have *told* my *words*," *davar* being used for both.

Vss. 34-49: The servant recounts to Laban and Bethuel the details of his mission from Abraham and how he had encountered Rebekah at the well. The response is in vs. 50: "The *thing* (*daver*) comes from the Lord." Recognition of this "speaking" (cf. verbal root, *davar*) leads the two men not to *speak* or *davar*; they immediately consent to let Rebekah be Isaac's bride "as the Lore has *spoken* (*davar*, vs. 51)."

Vs. 56: In the previous verse Rebekah's family requested that she remain with them for ten days, but the servant responds, "Do not delay me." Reason: the Lord *prospered* (*tsalach*) his *way* or *derek* which can refer not only to his journey but the mission. Cf. vs. 21 for the context of this *tsalach*: "The man gazed at her in silence to learn whether the Lord has *prospered* his *journey* (*derek*) or not."

Vs. 60: Laban and Bethuel bestow their blessing upon Rebekah by wishing her to be the "mother of thousands of ten thousands" as well as her descendants "to possess the gates of those who hate them." This blessing parallels that in 22.17: "I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies."

Vs. 62: Isaac was away at Beer-lachai-roi, "well of the one who sees and lives" noted in 16.14, the place where Hagar and her son Ishmael were saved after Sarah had sent them away. In a sense, Isaac's presence there may be taken as a preparation for meeting Rebekah.

Vs. 63: Upon his return, Isaac was *meditating* (*suach*) in the field, the only use of this verb. He does this "in the evening;" cf. vs. 12 when the servant first meets Rebekah. Such meditating intimates a kind of sauntering, of musing perhaps upon his visit at Beer-lachai-roi—that place of seeing—for Isaac raises his eyes and sees the servant and his entourage coming towards him.

Vs. 64: In the previous verse Isaac lifted his eyes; the same applies to Rebekah who immediately gets off the camel to meet him although she remains uncertain as to his identity.

Vs. 65: Rebekah covers herself with a *veil* or *tsahyph*; the only other mention of this word is in 38.14: "(Tamar) put off her widow's garments and put on a *veil*."

Vs. 66: The Hebrew text says that not only does Isaac take Rebekah to his tent but "Sarah his mother." There is no record of any conversation between Rebekah and Isaac, for the mysterious setting of these verses suffices to convey their interaction.

Vs. 67: Chapter 24 concludes with "So Isaac was *comforted* (*nacham*) after his mother's death." This verb alternately means "to lament," "to take vengeance." The fundamental sense is "to groan." "Do not labor to *comfort* me for the destruction of the daughter of my people" [Is 22.4]. It is interesting that these words are inserted because the previous verse has "Sarah his mother" accompanying Isaac with Rebekah into his tent.

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## Chapter Twenty-Five

Vs. 1: This chapter begins with Abraham taking another wife, Keturah. Note that the last chapter concluded with Sarah entering the tent with Isaac and Rebekah; it is as though once she did, Sarah disappeared from the scene. Vss. 2-5 list the ancestry of Arabic tribes which trace their roots to Abraham through Keturah.



Vs. 6: Abraham sends his concubines away from Isaac, that is, eastwards, so that they will not interfere with the newly contracted marriage with Rebekah.

Vs. 8: Abraham *breathed his last* or *gawah*, that is exhaled his life. “Man dies and is laid low; man *breathes his last*, and where is he” [Job 14.10]?

-After his death, Abraham was “gathered to his people” as opposed to those aliens among whom he had dwelt as a sojourner for so many years. “And die on the mountain which you (Moses) ascend and be gathered to your people” [Ex 32.50].

Vs. 9: Both Isaac and Ishmael bury Abraham “in the cave of Machpelah” which he had purchased to bury Sarah (cf. 23.19). This is the first appearance of Ishmael after Sarah had banished him and his mother Hagar. Cf. Beer-lachai-roi in 16.14 to which Isaac, not Ishmael returns because he had been there prior to meeting Rebekah (cf. 24.62).

Vss. 12-21 present the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac.

Vs. 21: Isaac *prays* (*hatar*) to God for his barren wife Rebekah to conceive. “Then man *prays* to God, and he accepts him, he comes into his presence with joy” [Job 33.26]. Compare this with Hannah: “Go in peace and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made to him” [1 Sam 1.17].

The rest of Chapter 25 recounts the birth of Jacob and Esau.

Vs. 22: *Struggled* (*ratsats*): this verb heralds the impending conflict between the two brothers and their descendants. It implies a breaking down or violent oppression: “...who oppress the poor, who *crush* the needy” [Amos 4.1].

-The rest of this verse is obscure, something like, “Why this I?”

-Due to this *ratsats* within her, Rebekah *inquires* (*darash*) of the Lord. Cf. 9.5 for another use of this verb: “For your lifeblood I will surely *require* a reckoning.” Coupled with this inquiring Rebekah “goes,” that is, although the twins are struggling violently within her, she escapes it.

Vs. 23: “two *nations*” (*goy*) and “two peoples.” Both will be *divided* (*parad*). “And from these the nations *spread abroad* on the earth after the flood” [10.32]. Compare this two-ness, symbolic of future division, with the concord between the two babes in the wombs of Elizabeth and the Virgin Mary: “For behold, when the voice of your greeting came to my ears, the babe in my womb leaped for joy” [Lk 1.44].

-Rom 9.12 quotes the second half of this verse, “The elder will serve the younger,” that is, the younger representing the Church and the elder, Israel.

-*Twins* (*to'am*): the only other references are Sg 4.6 and 7.3 concerning the bride's breasts.

Vs. 25: *Esau* (*Hesau*): a play on Seir, the region of the Edomites (cf. vs. 30). Esau came from the womb *red* or ‘admony which bears similarity to the proper name “Edom.” Perhaps his being the first born resembles the creation of the original first born man or Adam (“Red”), from the soil in 2.7. In this second instance, attention is shifted from the prerogative of birth to divine election.

-“Hairy *mantle*” (*adereth*): in the sense of a wide or ample outer garment. “On that day every prophet will be ashamed of his vision when he prophesies; he will not put on a hairy *mantle* in order to deceive” [Zech 13.4].

Vs. 26: Jacob is born immediately after Esau and is therefore subject to him by reason of such a brief temporal sequence. This verse explains the name by reason of Jacob having grasped Esau's *heel* or *haqev*. “In the womb he took his brother by the *heel*, and in his manhood he strove with God” [Hos 12.3]. For another use of this term, cf. Sg 1.8: “If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow in the *tracks* of the flock.”

Vs. 27: Esau was a “skilled hunter” or in Hebrew, “*knowing* (*yadah* as in 24.16, that is, having intimate knowledge) *hunting* or *tsayd*. “He was a mighty *hunter* before the Lord; therefore it is said, ‘Like Nimrod a mighty *hunter* before the Lord’” [10.9].

-Esau was also a “man of the *field*” (*sade*), a play on *tsayd* just noted.

-Jacob was a “*quiet* man” or *tam*. This word has an expanded sense of being full, innocent. “He who walks in *integrity* walks securely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out” [Prov 10.9]. Also cf. 20.5: “In the *integrity* of my heart” with reference Abraham’s deception of Abimelech.

-Jacob also *dwelt* (*yashav*) in tents as opposed to being out in the wilderness like Esau.

-Compare Esau and Jacob with Cain and Abel. The former was a “tiller of the ground” [4.2] and the latter, “a keeper of sheep” (same verse).

Vs. 28: Isaac *loved* (*‘ahav*) Esau, and Rebekah loved Jacob which reflects the divided condition already present among the two babes in Rebekah’s womb.

Vs. 29: *Pottage* (*nazyd*): something boiled, the verb also being used in this verse. “Set on the great pot and boil *pottage* for the sons of the prophets” [2 Kg 4.38].

Vs. 30: *Red pottage* or in the Hebrew text, *ha’adom ha’adom*. Perhaps the redness of this food reflected the “red” character of Esau/Edom, a sense conveyed by vs. 31: “Therefore his name was called Edom.”

Vs. 31: “First” or in the Hebrew text literally as “as day.”

-Jacob demands Esau’s *birthright* or *bekorath*. “That no one be immoral or irreligious like Esau, who sold his *birthright* for a single meal” [Heb 12.16]. Keep in mind that Jacob escaped having this birthright only by a fraction of a second by reason of his immediate birth after his brother.

Vs. 33: Another use of “as day” for “first” in the Hebrew text.

Vs. 34: In vs. 32 Esau was so hungry that his birthright seemed as nothing to him. In this verse he *despised* (*bazah*) it. “He who keeps the commandment keeps his life; he who *despises* the word will die” [Prov 19.16]. Such contempt is emphasized by the words preceding it, “and rose and went his way.”

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## Chapter Twenty-Six

Vs. 1: *Famine* (*rahav*): The first mention of such a famine is in 12.10 which is noted as the “former” one. Also cf. 44.55 where the verb of this noun is used: “When all the land of Egypt was *famished*, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread.” This crisis forces Isaac to return to Gerar, first mentioned in 20.1, that is, after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Vs. 2: The Lord *appeared* (*ra’ah*) to Jacob, the first instance being 12.7 when the Lord promised the land of Canaan to his descendants. Apparently Isaac intended to go to Egypt much like Joseph’s brothers later in 40.2 but was prevented from so doing by the Lord.

Vs. 3: *Sojourn* (*gur*): as in Gerar, 20.1. In the verse at hand, such *gur* is “in this land” whereas in vs. 2 it was one which “I shall tell you.” Despite this uprooting after the example of his grandfather Abraham, the Lord repeats that he will be with Isaac, bless him and give both him and his descendants not only the land in which he is in, but he will be in “all these lands.”

Vs. 4: The same promise given to Jacob as to his grandfather Abraham in 12.2-3.7.

Vs. 5: “Because:” an important word in this context which shows the pre-eminence of Abraham in God’s eyes. Here God says that he will extend the same blessings to Isaac “because” Abraham did the following: obeyed his voice, kept his charge, commandments, statutes and laws. This can be seen as an anticipation of the keeping of the Torah revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai as often noted in the Book of Deuteronomy.

Vs. 6: “So Isaac dwelt in Gerar.” The word “so” (*‘and’* in Hebrew) indirectly shows Jacob’s obedience to the divine promise just noted.

Vss. 7-11 tell the incident when Isaac protected the identity of his wife Rebekah, that is, by calling her his sister. These verses echo the same story with Abraham and Sarah in Egypt (12.11-20) as well as in Gerar, the same place in which Jakob is dwelling (20.2-7). In both the latter and current situation, Abimelech is involved.

Vs. 12: "In that land" or Gerar where Isaac sows and *reaps* (*matsa'*, alternately as 'to find') a hundred-fold. Such agricultural abundance indicates a more settled way of life compared with Abraham.

Vs. 13: "The man" refers to Isaac which shows a certain distance after the previous verse has the Lord blessing him.

-Three uses of the verb *gadal*: *become rich*, *gained* more and more (used with *halak*, *to go*) *became* (very) *wealthy*.

Vs. 14: Although vs. 12 says that Isaac sowed and reaped, the verse at hand reverts to the nomadic standard of wealth, flocks and herds. Note the similarity of words: had *possessions* (*qanah* being the verbal root) and *envy* (*qana'*) by the Philistines.

Vs. 16: "Much *mightier* than we:" *hatsam* from which is derived the noun "bone." "Those who are my foes without cause are *mighty*." The verse at hand is uttered by Abimelech as a result of his possessions and household noted in vs. 14.

Vs. 17: Despite having been dismissed by Abimelech, Isaac pitched camp in the valley of Gerar where Abimelech was king (cf. 20.2).

Vs. 18: The first of many wells which Isaac digs ('again'), that is, in reference to his father Abraham (cf. 21.25-34). Not only this but just as important, Isaac gave these wells the same names Abraham bestowed upon them, that is, Beer-sheba (cf. 21.31), "Well of seven" or "Well of the oath." This well contained "springing water" or more accurately, "*living* (*chayim*) water," vs. 19.

Vs. 20: Isaac names this well (rather, re-names it) Esek or "Contention" because his herdsmen and those of Gerar contended over it. A similar situation occurs in vs. 21 where the well is named Sitnah or "Enmity."

22: Rehoboth: the second well which Isaac digs or "Broad Places:" "for the Lord has *made room* (*rachav*) for us." "Relieve the trouble of my heart and *bring* me out of my distresses" [Ps 25.17] or literally, "The troubles of my heart are *enlarged*."

Vs. 23: Beer-sheba: Isaac "goes up" there, that is, to the well of "living water" noted in vs. 18.

Vs. 24: The Lord *appeared* (*yare'*) to Isaac that "same night" or the very day he arrived at Beer-sheba promising to bless him "for Abraham's sake" (i.e., not for Isaac's sake).

Vs. 25: This verse has a fourfold sequence: built an altar, called upon the Lord's name, pitched tent, dug (another or third) well. Note the three uses of *there* (*sham*) to emphasize the importance of this place.

Vs. 28: *Plainly* (*yare'*): a double use of this verb to stress clarity of insight by Abimelech along with his adviser and military commander, that is, because "the Lord is with you." This reflects the covenant Abimelech made with Isaac's father, Abraham, again with respect to Beer-sheba (cf. 21.32).

Vs. 29: "Now blessed by the Lord:" emphasis is upon "now" which means that Abimelech at last realized the special role of Isaac.

Vs. 33: Shibah: another name for Beer-sheba and closely related to it in response to Isaac's servants having found water after the covenant made with Abimelech.

Vs. 35: This verse forebodes the incident between Isaac and his brother Esau by saying that he and his wife “made life bitter” or literally, “bitter *spirit*” (*ruach*).

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## Chapter Twenty-Seven

Vs. 1: “Eyes were *dim*” (*kahah*): in the sense of failing in strength, that is, concerning Isaac. An alternative meaning may be found in Is 42.4: “He will not *fail* or be discouraged until he has established justice in the earth.”

Vs. 3: Four words with similar sounds applied to Isaac’s older son, Esau: *go out* (*tse’* or *yatsa’*), *field* (*sadeh*), *hunt* (*tsod*), *game* (*tsedah*); the last two are derived from the same verbal root. Compare this story of Esau and Jacob with that of Cain and Abel (4.2-16). Esau was a hunter which parallels Abel as a “keeper of sheep;” Jacob was a “quiet man, dwelling in tents” [25.27] which parallels Cain, a “tiller of the ground.”

Vs. 4: “Bless *you*,” the Hebrew text has *nephesh* or *soul*...“that my *soul* may bless you.”

Vs. 8: “Obey my *word*” (*qol*) or *voice*, that is, Jacob with respect to obeying his mother Rebekah.

Vs. 11: *Hairy* (*sahir*) as applied to Esau. “In that day the Lord will shave with a razor which is hired beyond the River—with the king of Assyria—the head and the *hair* of the feet” [Is 7.20].

-*Smooth* (*chalaq*) as applied to Jacob. “To preserve you from the evil woman, from the *smooth* tongue of the adventuress” [Prov 6 24]. The noun can mean a “lot,” “portion:” “The Lord is my chosen *portion* and my cup” [Ps 16.5]. Note the connection between Jacob’s smoothness of skin with his proper name, “He takes by the heel” or “he supplants” (cf. 25.26). I.e., both allude to his craftiness...slipperiness...which borders on deviousness.

Vs. 12: “I shall seem:” the Hebrew text literally reads, “and I shall be in his eyes.” Although Isaac was blind and thus unable to see, this expression is figurative.

-*Curse* (*qelalah*): as opposed to a blessing. This word derives from a verb meaning “to be diminished” and implies a lessening of the favors already in one’s possession as well as those lying in the future. “All these *curse*s shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed” [Dt 28.45].

Vs. 13: *Curse* (*qelalah*): as in the previous verse. The first curse was on the serpent (3.14) who deceived Adam and Eve; the second was upon the land (3.17), i.e., upon which the serpent had its native habitat. Another noun derived from this verbal root is *qalal*, *smooth* in the sense of polished and is interesting to consider in light of Jacob’s smoothness. “And they sparkled like *burnished* bronze” [Ezk 1.7].

-Two words which are similar in sound to *qelalah*: *my word* (*beqoly*) and *fetch* (*qach*).

Vs. 15: “*Best* garment:” from the verbal root *chamad*, *to desire*, *to delight*. I.e., the garment in which Esau took the most delight but perhaps rarely wore since he was fond of hunting.

-Note the word “garment” which is derived from a verbal root (*bagad*), *to act fraudulently*. In the case at hand, it relates well with Rebekah’s deceit. Usually a father is depicted as handing on his personal traits and characteristics as well as inheritance to his sons. Here the mother is handing on to her son Jacob the ability to trick and to deceive which he will make use of later on. Consider this in view of Eve when she tricked Adam to eat the fruit in Eden whose antecedent is of course the serpent. “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be *desired* (*chamad*) to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; she also gave some to her husband” [3.7]. This taking/receiving is also echoed when Rebekah took and received the savory food from her son Jacob. Frequent reference to “savory food” heightens the sense of deception.

Vs. 16: *Kids* (*gedayey hahozym*): literally, “kids of she-goats,” in reference to the skins Rebekah places upon her son’s neck and hands to imitate Esau’s hair. The first word can mean a kid per se as in Dt 14.21: “You shall not

boil a *kid* in its mother's milk." The second word or she-goat proper is first used in 15:9: "Bring me a heifer three years old, a *she-goat* three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove and a young pigeon."

Vs. 18: Isaac is lying in bed unable to see and uses the common *Here I am* or *hineny* (alternately, 'behold'). This act of making his presence known and what is about to occur is intimated in the giving and taking of the food, Esau's garment and kid-skins.

Vs. 20: "Granted me success:" the Hebrew text literally reads, "called before me." It is not Jacob's "Lord God" but his father's ('your') which may intimate that Jacob is in the process of deceiving his father.

Vs. 21: *Feel* (mashash). Perhaps the most graphic instance is Ex 10:21: "...that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be *felt*." For another sense of this verb, cf. Dt 28:29: "And you shall grope at noonday as the blind *grope* in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways." In the verse at hand, Isaac uses the sense of feeling to know (lacking in the Hebrew text) or to discern whether he is speaking with Esau or someone else. In the next verse Isaac feels the kid skin and knows that it is Esau yet hears the voice of Jacob.

Vs. 23: *Recognize* (nakar). This verb has two different uses: "to be ignorant of," "to recognize." It fundamentally means "to be foreign." The idea seems to be looking at something about which you know little yet is identified later. A good instance which relates to the situation at hand is 42:7: "Joseph saw his brothers and *knew* them, but he *treated* them *like strangers* and spoke roughly to them." Here *nakar* is used in the two different sense just noted.

-Despite the conflict between the two senses (feeling and hearing) and what seems his preference for the former, Isaac trusted in the latter and blessed Jacob.

-In this verse Isaac blessed Jacob. In vs. 25 he wants Isaac (perceived as Esau) to bring him food and them impart his blessing.

Vs. 26: *Kiss* (nashaq): basically as "to arrange," "to put in order" and alternately as "to arm oneself." "It was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they *touched* one another" [Ezk 3:13]. Compare this use of *nashaq* with *mashash*, vs. 21.

Vs. 27: *Smelled* (ruach): used with the noun of this same verbal root (*smell* or *reyach*); from it is derived *spirit*. The scent of smell is less tangible than feeling yet offered sufficient evidence to Isaac that Esau was present, not Jacob. "And when the Lord *smelled* the pleasing *odor*" [8:21], a verse with the same two words. In the verse at hand, Isaac smelled not so much Jacob but his garments. As noted in vs. 15, the verbal root for this noun is "to deceive." I.e., it can be said that Isaac smelled the deception of his younger son but failed to trust in his initial reliance upon the sense of hearing (Jacob's voice as opposed to Esau's).

-To Isaac, the *reyach* of Jacob equals that of a field; not simply a field but one "blessed by the Lord." I.e., Isaac trusts the sense of smell over hearing.

Vs. 28: Isaac beseeches God to impart to Esau (Jacob) nine blessings listed here through vs. 29:

1) "*Dew* (tal) of heaven:" first mention of this word in the Bible. In vs. 39 Isaac wishes Esau to be distant from this dew. I.e., dew is not rain but that very light moisture on grass which the sun evaporates. Most likely the rough character of Esau would not appreciate it.

2) "*Fatness* (shemen) of earth:" i.e., the opposite of dew, fat being heavy compared with dew. This term can also apply to the earth's fruitfulness: "Woe to...the fading flower of its glorious beauty which is on the head of the *rich* valley of those overcome by wine" [Is 28:1]!

3) "Plenty of *grain* (dagen) and *wine* (tyrosh):" two elements associated with harvest as opposed to a hunting society; the other two (dew and fatness) may also apply in this case. Keep in mind that Isaac thinks he is blessing Esau with them, not Jacob; Esau as hunter would not be familiar with them.

4) "Peoples *serve* (havad) you:" not necessarily be slaves, although this can apply.

5) "Nations *bow down* (shachah):" as in 22:5, "I and the lad will go yonder and *worship*." Also cf. 23:12 where it connotes the giving of respect: "Then Abraham *bowed down* before the people of the land."

6) "*Be lord* (gevyr):" that is to say, with respect to Esau's (Jacob's) brothers. The only other instance of this

noun is in vs. 37 with respect to the real Esau. The verb connotes prevailing as well as strength.

7) "Mother's sons *bow down* (shachah; cf. #5 above) to you." Unknown to Isaac, his wife Rebekah instigated the plot to deceive him as described in these verses.

8) "*Cursed* ('arar) be everyone who *curses* you." First used in 3.14 with respect to the serpent, "*cursed* are you above all cattle, above all wild animals."

9) "*Blessed* (barak) be everyone who *blesses* you."

Vs. 30: *Scarcely gone out* (yatsa' yatsa'): the same verb used twice to emphasize the departure of Jacob from Isaac after receiving his blessing through deception. More precisely, it depicts the coming of Esau. Jacob leaves Isaac's "presence" whereas Esau does not enter his presence.

Vs. 31: "That you may bless me." The Hebrew text has "your *soul* (nephesh; cf. vs. 4)."

Vs. 32: "Who are you?" or Isaac's query to Esau as in vs. 18 where "my son" is added. Perhaps the lack of this phrase intimates Jacob's preference over Esau.

Vs. 33: "Isaac *trembled violently*" (charad): the same verb used twice to indicate the intensity of his emotion. "Ramah *trembles*, Gibeah of Saul has fled" [Is 10.28]. Although Esau is the rightful first-born, Isaac's trembling—NB: recognizing Esau through hearing as opposed to feeling him—can intimate that Isaac prefers Jacob over him.

-Isaac persists in keeping Jacob blessed despite the deception; in fact, "he shall be blessed."

Vs. 34: "*Exceedingly* (had-me'od) great and bitter cry." The preposition had connotes duration and intensity on Esau's part.

Vs. 35: Isaac was uncertain as to Jacob's identity ("The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau," vs. 22); he came to his father with *guile* (mirmah). "Shall I acquit the man with wicked scales and with a bag of *deceitful weights*" [Mic 6.11]?

Vs. 36: Esau notes the connection between his brother Jacob's name and its verbal root, haqav (*supplanted*); cf. 25.26: "Afterward his brother came forth, and his hand had taken hold of Esau's *heel* (haqev) so his name was called Jacob." Esau says that Jacob did this twice, i.e., referring to his birth with Jacob. "In the womb he *took* his brother *by the heel*, and in his manhood he strove with God" [Hos 12.3].

-*Blessing* and *birthright* (berakah and bekorah): a play on words.

-*Reserved* ('atsal): fundamentally, "to connect." For another sense, cf. Num 11.17: "And I *will* take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them."

Vs. 37: *Lord* (gevyr): as noted in vs. 29, the only other time when this word occurs in the Bible. This preference for Jacob over Esau is not unlike that for Jacob for Joseph which arouses jealousy among his brothers, a story to follow not long after the one at hand (cf. 37.3-11).

Vs. 38: *Grain* and *wine* (dagen and tyrosh): as in vs. 28 above.

- "What can I then do for you, my son?" Words to Esau after he had complained to his father about Jacob; they are almost an insult to him as the first-born. The "one blessing" of this verse may be seen as a further insult to Esau, again, being the first-born.

Vs. 39: This verse does not contain a blessing by Isaac who simply "answered" Esau with two "away froms:" earth's fatness and heaven's dew.

Vs. 40: "By your sword you shall live." Possibly connected with Edom (which means red, like Esau) as in 2 Sam 8.12-14 and 1 Kg 11.14-22, 25.

-*Break loose* (rod): a verb used with respect to beasts and connotes wandering. For another sense: "Why then do my people say, 'We are *free*, we will come no more to you'" [Jer 2.31]?

-*Yoke* (hol): as with beasts of burden and connected with the act of breaking loose just noted. Such a yoke is

*broken* (paraq); for another use: “So all the people *took off* the rings of gold which were in their ears” [Ex 32.3].

Vs. 41: *Hated* (satem): more specifically, “to lay snares.” Cf. 50.15, Job 16.9 & 30.21, the only other uses of this verb.

-“To himself:” in the Hebrew text, “in his heart.”

-*Kill* (harag): as in 4.8 or when Cain killed his brother Abel. This verb can be used with respect to enemies in war as well as animals for food. In a sense, the Esau/Jacob story is intermediate between that of Cain and Abel (in the past) and Joseph and his brothers (in the future).

Vs. 42: Rebekah discovers Esau’s intent to slay Jacob but only indirectly, “the words...were told.”

-“*Comforts* (nacham) himself:” first used in 5.29; also can mean “to take vengeance” as in Is 1.24: “I will vent my wrath on my enemies and *avenge* myself on my foes.”

-the word “planning” is absent in the Hebrew text.

Vs. 43: “Hear my voice:” directed to Jacob by his mother, Rebekah. Use of “voice” may signify closer attention than to Rebekah herself, i.e., this word being put at the service of God. Here she wishes Jacob to reside with her brother Laban in Haran.

Vs. 44: *Stay* (yashav): in the sense of dwelling, of remaining for an indefinite period of time. “And as men migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and *settled* there” [11.2]. The verb *shuv* (*turns away*) used with respect to Esau’s *fury* (chamah) parallels this dwelling. The latter derives from a verb associated with warmth; also can mean *venom*: “And I will send the teeth of beasts against them, with *venom* of crawling things of the dust” [Dt 32.24].

Vs. 45: *Bereft* (shakal): with respect to the potential loss of Esau and Jacob. This verb can apply to being childless: “As your sword has *made* women *childless*, so shall your mother *be childless* among women” [1 Sam 15.33].

Vs. 46: Chapter 28 concludes with a kind of rhetorical statement by Rebekah concerning Hittite (i.e., Canaanite) women and the danger of her son Jacob marrying one of them. I.e., she is *weary* (quts), a verb which alternately means “to be aroused, “to cut off.” A noun derived from it means “thorn.” “For there is no food and no water, and we *loathe* this worthless food” [Num 21.5].

-The Hebrew text puts Rebekah’s complaint as “Why to me life?”

-For reference to the Hittite or Canaanites, cf. 23.3-4: “And Abraham rose up from before his dead and said to the Hittites, ‘I am a stranger and a sojourner among you.’” Thus Rebekah wishes Jacob to be faithful to Abraham. The same applies to Abraham not wishing a wife for his son Isaac (cf. 24.3) who is Jacob’s father.