

interpretation

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interpretation

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The Lion and the Ass:

A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 25–30)

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CHAPTER XXV

1. THEN AGAIN ABRAHAM TOOK A WIFE, AND HER NAME WAS KETURAH
2. AND SHE BARE HIM ZIMRAN AND JOKSHAN AND MEDAN AND MIDIAN AND ISHBAK AND SHUAH
3. AND JOKSHAN BEGAT SHEBA AND DEDAN AND THE SONS OF DEDAN WERE ASSHURIM AND LETUSHIM AND LEUMMIM
4. AND THE SONS OF MIDIAN EPHAH AND EPHER AND HANOCH AND ABIDAL AND ELDAAH ALL THESE WERE THE CHILDREN OF KETURAH.

Abraham's life after the marriage of his son, Isaac, may at first come as a surprise. He was described as *Stricken With Age* at the beginning of Chapter Twenty-four. Ishmael was thirteen years old at the time of Isaac's birth (Gen. 17:25), and Isaac is now forty (Gen. 25:20). Fifty-three years after Abraham was considered to be much too old to have a child he remarried and had no less than seven sons. The names of these men would make an impressive list of descendants for any patriarch other than the founder of the New Way. Wholly apart from his divine calling Abraham is still an impressive figure. The Dedanites, and Asshurim and the Sabaeans are often mentioned in the Bible as being great and wealthy nations, but the full significance of Abraham's new life will be discussed in the commentary to Gen. 35:28 (See Jer. 6:20, 25:23, 49:8; Is. 21:13; Ezek. 27:15–23; Job. 1:15).

Though Abraham's other life, the one not devoted to the New Way, is impressive in its own right, it is by no means completely disconnected from his life as the founder of the New Way. While we have discussed Israel's connection with the Queen of Sheba (See commentary to Gen. 20:4) the most interesting of his descendants is Midian. A passing caravan of Midianites found Joseph in the pit where his brothers had placed him and sold him into Egypt by the hands of the Ishmaelites. The Midianites were thus aware of a certain inner weakness within the people, and the various ways in which this awareness affected her relations with Israel make up an intricate story.

The next Midianite whom we shall meet is a man of many names who will probably be the most influential foreigner Israel will meet. He is first called by the name of Reuel (Ex. 2:18), which as we shall see later, is not his own name, but the name of his father. The practice of calling a man by his father's name or even his grandfather's is not uncommon in the Bible and should be of

no great difficulty at this point. It is however crucial that we keep track of the places in which he is called by the same name and try to understand why he is called different names in other places.

Reuel was the Midian priest who welcomed Moses after his escape from Egypt where he had killed an Egyptian taskmaster. One day Moses was sitting by a Midianite well when the shepherdess who was to become his wife happened along. With the same princely dignity which Abraham showed to the three strangers, he assisted the shepherdess in watering her flock, and she returned home. Up till this point the story was much like the story of Jacob and his bride, but Reuel was a very different man from Laban. The Midian priest was a friendly man who offered Moses a place of rest and his daughter as wife.

When God commanded Moses to return to Egypt and free his people he went to his father-in-law, now called Jethro, to ask permission to leave. Jethro made no demands for full payment as Laban had done but merely said *Go in peace* (Ex. 4:18).

After Moses' first battle, in which he defeated the Amelekites, Jethro arrived at the camp with his daughter Zipporah and Moses' two sons, who had presumably been living with their grandfather during Moses' stay in Egypt. The meeting between Jethro and his son-in-law in many ways shows that Jethro has understood the New Way in its highest form. He rejoices and *Blesses the Lord* for having delivered Israel, and the evening is completed by sharing a sacrifice and a feast in the love and good fellowship envisaged by the Jubilee Year.

Jethro spent the night, and in the morning as he walked through the camp he noticed a crowd of people gathered around Moses' tent and was troubled (Ex. 18:13). Jethro was the first man to see that even with the help of God Moses could not continue leading the people by judging individual cases. The job was too immense for one man, and there was no guarantee that he could be replaced after his death. The whole notion of a law for Israel was due to the insight of Jethro, who advised Moses to ask God for a law which could be administered even by men of lesser stature than Moses himself (Ex. 18:23, and see commentary to Gen. 15:9). After this advice, which was critical for establishing the means to the New Way, Jethro, with Moses' good graces, returned to his own country (Ex. 18:27).

Moses' father-in-law will next appear under the name of Hobab, the son of Reuel the Midianite (Num. 10:29). This is our fourth meeting. We first met him briefly as Reuel in Ex. Chap. 2, when Moses met and married his daughter. It was Jethro who sent him off to Egypt in Chapter Four, and again Jethro who arrived at the camp fourteen chapters later.

The story of Hobab begins very much like the meeting between Moses and Jethro at that camp, but the rest of the story will be quite different. All of this confusion with regard to his name tends to put some distance between the

two meetings at the camp, but the early chapters taken together assure us that Hobab the son of Reuel is Jethro.

In the account of the second meeting at the camp, we are reminded that Reuel was a Midianite. That fact had been left out of the first account. Things go about the same, but when Hobab again asks for permission to leave and return to his people, the request is denied on the grounds that he is familiar with the layout of the camp. Whatever it is that Moses fears it is not his father-in-law himself. The two men are still close, and Jethro is invited to throw his lot in with the people and share the blessings of the new land (Num. Chap. 10). Twelve chapters later, after the Amorites had been defeated by Israel, in the battle east of the Jordan, the Midianites and the Moabites became suspicious that Israel would not keep her promise of peace and sent for the prophet, Balaam. Moab decided to attack, but it is by no means clear that the Midianites actually took part in the battle.

Now Balaam was from Mesopotamia and was a Prophet of the Lord (Num. 22:1–5). Where he came from is anybody's guess, but Mesopotamia had only been mentioned once before. In Gen. 24:10 it was used to describe the country to which Abraham's servant went when he returned to Abraham's homeland in order to get a wife for Isaac. Back in Gen. 12:5, when Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot out of Haran, the text added that he took with him *the souls that he had got in Haran*. The most reasonable assumption would be that Abram had converted a number of people to the New Way while in Haran. Apparently not all those people accompanied him on his journey, and Balaam may be a descendant of one of those men. He is a man piously devoted to the *Lord* but seems never to have heard of the people of Israel.

Balak, who was then reigning in Moab, sent a message to Balaam asking him to come and place a curse on this mass of people who had suddenly come into the land and looked so menacing in spite of their words of peace. Balak regards Balaam as a man with strange powers which he can use at his own will. Balaam was sympathetic to Balak's cause, but apparently the tradition of the Lord has not degenerated in the hands of Balaam to such an extent. Balaam's answer was that he would be willing to curse this people if such was the will of God. Balaam then went to the Lord in order to ask Him whether he should join Balak, and the Lord answered *Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed* (Num. 22:12). But Balak insisted that Balaam go to the Lord a second time. His answer to Balak was the same as before: he would do nothing but the will of God. Balak's men were asked to spend the night while Balaam returned to the Lord in order to see what he should do. This time the Lord told Balaam to accompany the men but to say nothing other than what the Lord would tell him. The text then says that God was angry and sent an angel to block Balaam's way. Now Balaam was riding an ass, and while Balaam could not see the angel, the ass could

and turned aside. Balaam beat the ass and tried to turn it back onto the path. Their way went through a vineyard alongside of a wall, and the next time the ass saw the angel she turned and bumped into the wall, crushing Balaam's foot, and was beaten again. Finally the ass, not knowing where to go, fell down. Then a miracle happened. The ass spoke to Balaam asking him why he had beaten her. Balaam replied that he had beaten her because she had mocked him, and he threatened to kill her. Then the ass asked Balaam why he could not trust a friend who had served him for so many years.

It was only after hearing these words that Balaam could see the angel. Balaam repented, and the angel commanded him to continue on his journey but reminded him of God's command to say or do nothing but what he was told.

At Balak's insistence Balaam made several sacrifices to the Lord. Finally the Lord told Balaam to return to Balak but to speak only the words which he would put in his mouth. There ensue a number of episodes in which Balak tries to convince Balaam to curse these people who threaten his land, and each time Balaam blesses the people with perhaps the most beautiful blessings in the book. The blessings may have come from the Lord, but Balaam's repeated insistence that he could do nothing but what the Lord told him must have come from himself.

After his final blessing Balaam, as Abram had done after his discussion with God concerning Sodom and Gomorrah, *returned to his place*, and Balak retired from the field.

Five chapters later the Moabites then tried to conquer Israel by another means. The daughters of Moab were sent down to seduce the sons of Israel into serving the God of Baalpeor, and among them was a Midianite woman named Kozbi, the daughter of Zur, who seduced one of the Israelites in a more literal sense.

Shortly before Balaam had appeared, Aaron died under strange circumstances which will be discussed in the commentary to Gen. 49:5, and his duties were formally taken over by his son, Eleazar. For reasons which will also become clear at that time Eleazar all but retired from his duties as High Priest after the death of his father. His son, Phinehas, however was a true son of Levi and quickly despatched Kozbi and her lover with his javelin, and in reward for his zeal he and his descendants were granted the everlasting priesthood. After this episode Moses and Eleazar calm the people by taking a census, and the book takes up the story of the men from Reuben and Gad and the daughters of Zelophehad which was retold in the commentary to Gen. 15:9.

In Chapter Thirty-one of the Book of Numbers, God announces to Moses that it is time for Israel to take its vengeance on the Midianites for their seduction. During the war Balaam was killed (Num. 31:8). At first glance the death of Balaam appears to be quite unjust, but later in the chapter we are told that it was he who convinced the Midianite women to seduce Israel (Num. 31:16). While this accusation might justify the actions in Chapter Thirty-

one it would be difficult to see its proper relation to the earlier story, in which Balaam appeared to be a true follower of the Lord.

In order to see this relation we must return to the conversation between Balaam and the ass. If God spoke through the mouth of the ass then it was God and not the ass who had served His friend Balaam those many years. Balaam was intended to be an alternative route towards the fulfillment of the promise. Like the brothers Moab and Edom he, as the student of a tradition going back to Abraham, was to have been another means for the spreading of the New Way. He did not trust his old friend because he did not realize the importance of time and of waiting. The only way in which one can understand his sending the Midianite women in the light of his earlier trust in God is to assume a deep desire on his part to begin the spread of the promise without realizing that the proper time had not yet come and that Israel needed more time in which to prepare herself.

When God first announced to Moses that the time had come for Israel to revenge itself upon the Midianites, His exact words were: *Avenge the Children of Israel of the Midianites. Afterwards shalt thou be gathered unto thy people* (Num. 31:2). As we have noted before it is somewhat difficult to understand in what sense this can be called revenge, and it is even more difficult to see why this affair should be related to Moses' death. After the battle the men are again attracted to the women of Midia, and the text continues as follows:

And Moses was wroth with the officers of the hosts, with the captains over thousands, and captains over hundreds, which came from the battle. 15. And Moses said unto them, Have ye saved all the women alive? 16. Behold, these caused the Children of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to commit trespass against the Lord in the matter of Peor, and there was a plague among the congregation of the Lord. (Num. 31:14-16)

When Moses first met Jethro it had seemed as though the Midianite people who had produced such a priest might be those people through whom the promise given to Abraham might be fulfilled. Their closeness to Israel might form a bridge between the New Way and the other nations. When Moses saw that the attraction went the other way, that this very closeness could equally well seduce Israel away from its own path, he understood why God had connected his own death to the battle with the Midianites. When the sons of Israel left the New Way they were doing nothing more than imitating Moses, who in all innocence had been the first to marry a Midianite woman. His anger in Verse Fourteen stems both from his great disappointment and from the knowledge that he shared the responsibility in a way which he could never have foreseen.

Throughout the later period, a narrow thread still connects Israel and Midia. Jael, whom we had discussed in the commentary to Gen. 20:7, was the wife of Heber, a Kenite, one of the children of Hobab (Judg. 4:11). She was the

woman who killed Sisera, the captain of Jabin, the King of Hatzor. Jabin was presumably a descendant of the other king Jabin, whom Joshua had fought many years before (Josh. Chap. 11). Now Hatzor was of some strategic importance since it was the first nation on the eastern side of the Sinai to have chariots of iron, but Joshua was able to capture and destroy them. Modern scholars have often remarked that the burning of the chariots proved that the men of Israel had not yet acquired the art of horsemanship. This may or may not be true but certainly does not account for the Biblical attitude toward chariots and horses.

In the fourteenth chapter of Exodus one sees nothing but disdain for Pharaoh's horses and chariots, which are all drowned in the Red Sea, and in Deuteronomy one of the limitations placed on any potential king in Israel is that he not gain his strength through the use of horses (Deut. 17:16). This limitation on a king was fairly well kept until the reign of King Solomon (I Kings 9:19) though David had already acquired a small cavalry (II Sam. 8:4). The fear of modern armaments and the centralization of power in the hands of the king seem to be the last shreds of the original opposition to kingship in general. Horses and chariots symbolize the force of foreign power. By killing Sisera, Jael, the descendant of Hobab, reaffirmed the relation between Midia and Israel. Though she could not form a bridge between Israel and the other nations she could at least play a buffer role. For a more complete discussion of the position of horses in the development of Israel, see the commentary to Gen. 41:43.

5. AND ABRAHAM GAVE ALL THAT HE HAD UNTO ISAAC.

Verse Five is probably best taken as a reminder to the reader that Abraham had already given his belongings to Isaac in Chapter Twenty-four.

6. BUT UNTO THE SONS OF THE CONCUBINES, WHICH ABRAHAM HAD, ABRAHAM GAVE GIFTS, AND SENT THEM AWAY FROM ISAAC HIS SON, WHILE HE YET LIVED, EASTWARD, UNTO THE EAST COUNTRY.

7. AND THESE ARE THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF ABRAHAM'S LIFE WHICH HE LIVED, AN HUNDRED THREESCORE AND FIFTEEN YEARS.

8. THEN ABRAHAM EXPIRED, AND DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE, AN OLD MAN AND FULL OF YEARS; AND WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE.

9. AND HIS SONS ISAAC AND ISHMAEL BURIED HIM IN THE CAVE OF MACHPELAH, IN THE FIELD OF EPHRON THE SON OF ZOHAR THE HITTITE, WHICH IS BEFORE MAMRE;

10. THE FIELD WHICH ABRAHAM PURCHASED OF THE SONS OF HETH: THERE WAS ABRAHAM BURIED, AND SARAH HIS WIFE.

The early books of the Bible are reticent about the fate of men after death. Some mention is made of Samuel's ghost in I Sam. 28:13, but even there

the force of the passage is to indicate that Saul should have let Samuel sleep and have made no attempt to contact him. On the basis of Verse Eight the only thing one can safely say is that if Abraham *was gathered to his people* this can only mean that in death he is reunited with his father, Terah. If we are to take the statement literally it would seem to imply that the New Way is intended for the land of the living and that if there is a life after this life the distinction between the chosen and the nonchosen no longer plays a role. This explains why Ishmael is also present at Abraham's burial.

11. AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM, THAT GOD BLESSED HIS SON ISAAC; AND ISAAC DWELT BY THE WELL LAHAI-ROI.

The Well of Lahai-roi is to be associated with Ishmael (Gen. 24:62 and 16:14) and introduces the next section.

12. NOW THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ISHMAEL, ABRAHAM'S SON WHOM HAGAR THE EGYPTIAN, SARAH'S HANDMAID, BARE UNTO ABRAHAM.

13. AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE SONS OF ISHMAEL. BY THEIR NAMES ACCORDING TO THEIR GENERATIONS: THE FIRSTBORN OF ISHMAEL, NEBAJOTH; AND KEDAR, AND ADBEEL, AND MIBSAM.

14. AND MISHMA, AND DUMAH, AND MASSA.

15. HADAR, AND DUMAH, AND MASSA.

16. THESE ARE THE SONS OF ISHMAEL, AND THESE ARE THEIR NAMES, BY THE TOWNS, AND BY THEIR CASTLES; TWELVE PRINCES ACCORDING TO THEIR NATIONS.

17. AND THESE ARE THE YEARS OF THE LIFE OF ISHMAEL, AN HUNDRED AND THIRTY AND SEVEN YEARS: AND HE EXPIRED AND DIED; AND WAS GATHERED UNTO HIS PEOPLE.

We have already given an account of Ishmael's descendants in the commentary to Gen. 16:12.

18. AND THEY DWELT FROM HAVILAH UNTO SHUR, THAT IS BEFORE EGYPT, AS THOU GOEST TOWARD ASSYRIA: AND HE DIED IN THE PRESENCE OF ALL HIS BRETHREN.

We have already discussed Ishmael's relation to the country of Shur in the commentary to Gen. 20:1. Havilah however presents a more complicated problem because there were two Havilahs. One was the second son of Cush, the Hamite, the other, the twelfth son of Joktan, the Semite (Gen. 10:7 and 10:29). In other words, we are left in doubt as to whether Havilah is part of Ham, the cursed nation, or not.

In the commentary to Gen. 9:21 we noted that the incidents and places mentioned prior to the Flood were all erased and never mentioned again after Noah woke from his drunken sleep. There is however one exception. In the

commentary to Gen. 2:10–14 we discussed the significance of Eden's geographical position, which could not have been described without mentioning place names known to men after the Flood. In that context the land of Havilah was placed near Eden and was said to have large deposits of gold. The land between Shur and Havilah will again appear in I Sam. 15:7 as the battleground for the great war between Israel and its very special enemy Amalek (See commentary to Gen. 36:12). Havilah's proximity to Eden and its highly dubious character seem to present an ambiguity which would strengthen our remarks concerning Ishmael, the blessed *wild ass*, given in the commentary to Gen. 16:12.

19. AND THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ISAAC, ABRAHAM'S SON: ABRAHAM BEGAT ISAAC:

20. AND ISAAC WAS FORTY YEARS OLD WHEN HE TOOK REBEKAH TO WIFE, THE DAUGHTER OF BETHUEL THE SYRIAN OF PADAN-ARAM, THE SISTER TO LABAN THE SYRIAN.

In the light of what we have seen so far, and more especially in what we shall see later of Isaac, we can understand why he was married at the age of forty. In the commentary to Gen. 7:4 we made a list of all appearances of the numbers forty and four hundred in the Torah and showed that in each case it was connected with a period of gestation. As we shall see this is also true of the life of Isaac. We have already had a glimpse of that character in Chapter Twenty-four through the great role which providence began to play in the story. As we shall see Isaac is the true test of the New Way. Can the New Way live through a generation which does not have the stature of its founder, Abraham? Everything will depend on this test since Abraham's virtue was not the virtue of a private man but the virtue of a man who was able to establish a New Way which could last. If Isaac fails, Abraham will have failed to live up to Abimelech. It was therefore important that the Biblical author present Isaac as a kind of sleepy man and ultimately even as a blind old man. Of real concern is not his personal virtue but the ability of the New Way to maintain itself throughout the generations. These assertions will have to be proved by the ensuing chapters but they do give some indication as to the significance of Isaac's age.

21. AND ISAAC INTREATED THE LORD FOR HIS WIFE, BECAUSE SHE WAS BARREN: AND THE LORD WAS INTREATED OF HIM, AND REBEKAH HIS WIFE CONCEIVED.

22. AND THE CHILDREN STRUGGLED TOGETHER WITHIN HER; AND SHE SAID, IF IT BE SO, WHY AM I THUS? AND SHE WENT TO INQUIRE OF THE LORD.

23. AND THE LORD SAID UNTO HER, TWO NATIONS ARE IN THY WOMB, AND TWO MANNER OF PEOPLE SHALL BE SEPARATED FROM THY BOWELS; AND THE ONE PEOPLE SHALL BE STRONGER THAN THE OTHER PEOPLE; AND THE ELDER SHALL SERVE THE YOUNGER.

Rebekah's question is highly cryptic and difficult to interpret. While one should not be dogmatic in general about the possibility of a corruption in the text, one must equally be open to the possibility that the author may have expressed himself in ways that look a bit strange at first.

Rebekah's question reads *if it be so, why am I thus?* The word *so* is the same word which we discussed at some length in the commentary to Gen. 1:11b. If the word has the same significance that it had in the early chapter, where it implied a clear and definite path, Rebekah's question seems to be something like this: "If the direction which the New Way is to take has already been given, if Isaac has already been distinguished from Ishmael, why is there no direct and smooth transference from father to son? Why is there struggling going on?" Why are things not *so*?

God's answer is that the division has not been made absolute. Among the sons of Abraham an absolutely clear distinction was made between the two ways—the ways of the first son Ishmael the son of Hagar, and the way of Isaac the son of Sarah. Both children were expected, and each represents a different way of life. In this case the children are twins, of whom only the younger was expected. The older son, Esau, will appear as a kind of mean between Isaac and Ishmael. The clear distinction between the way of Ishmael and the way of Israel could not be maintained. Esau has appeared in the middle just as evening and morning come along with day and night. These mixtures, while unplanned, will be of gravest concern.

The unavailability of clear and sharp distinctions is another way of stating the fundamental problem of the book. In general it makes both necessary and possible the compromises or re-evaluations in the relationship between God and man which we have seen throughout the whole of this commentary.

24. AND WHEN HER DAYS TO BE DELIVERED WERE FULFILLED, BEHOLD, THERE WERE TWINS IN HER WOMB.
25. AND THE FIRST CAME OUT RED, ALL OVER LIKE AN HAIRY GARMENT; AND THEY CALLED HIS NAME ESAU.
26. AND AFTER THAT CAME HIS BROTHER OUT, AND HIS HAND TOOK HOLD OF ESAU'S HEEL; AND HIS NAME WAS CALLED JACOB: AND ISAAC WAS THREESCORE YEARS OLD WHEN SHE BARE THEM.
27. AND THE BOYS GREW: AND ESAU WAS A CUNNING HUNTER, A MAN OF THE FIELD; AND JACOB WAS A PLAIN MAN, DWELLING IN TENTS.
28. AND ISAAC LOVED ESAU, BECAUSE HE DID EAT OF HIS VENISON: BUT REBEKAH LOVED JACOB.

Esau's resemblance to Ishmael is, I believe, obvious, though at this point it is not yet fully clear in what sense he is like Israel. That side of his character will come to light in the following chapters.

Unlike the earlier distinction between Abraham and Lot, the present distinc-

tion is not between those who live in tents and those who live in houses but between the hunters and those who live in tents at peace with the land.

Rebekah's love for Jacob seems to be less self-interested than Isaac's love for Esau, though the full account of Isaac's special relation to Esau will not become visible till the end of the chapter.

29. AND JACOB SOD POTTAGE: AND ESAU CAME FROM THE FIELD, AND HE WAS FAINT:
30. AND ESAU SAID TO JACOB FEED ME I PRAY THEE, WITH THAT SAME RED STUFF; FOR I AM FAINT: THEREFORE WAS HIS NAME CALLED EDOM.
31. AND JACOB SAID, SELL ME THIS DAY THY BIRTHRIGHT.
32. AND ESAU SAID, BEHOLD, I'M GONNA DIE: NOW WHAT GOOD IS THIS HERE BIRTHRIGHT GONNA DO ME?
33. AND JACOB SAID, SWEAR TO ME THIS DAY; AND HE SWARE UNTO HIM: AND HE SOLD HIS BIRTHRIGHT UNTO JACOB.
34. THEN JACOB GAVE ESAU BREAD AND POTTAGE OF LENTILS: AND HE DID EAT AND DRINK, AND ROSE UP, AND WENT HIS WAY: AND ESAU HELD HIS BIRTHRIGHT IN CONTEMPT.

Like a man of the field Esau's speech is rough. This roughness is related to the over-gentility of city life. Lot and Cain both sought independence by fleeing from nature and establishing a place of their *own*. Esau looks for independence in the opposite sense. He lives in the field and lives by what he can get. In this sense we can bring into finer focus his kinship with Ishmael.

Unfortunately he is not very good at leading such a life and has come home empty-handed. For the moment the birthright looks to him useless, and he is willing to sell it for Jacob's lentils and bread. The description of the way in which he ate his meal in Verse Thirty-four forms a wonderful contrast to the description of Abraham during the sacrifice of Isaac. Again the words *and he ate, and he drank and rose up and went on his way* in Hebrew can all be said in four short words, each word forming a sentence by itself. We again have that starkness of language which typified the description of Abraham's sacrifice, but here it is used to show Esau's rough and almost gruff manner.

Esau is the morning and Esau is the evening. He is the middle which has come unbidden. He is the morning which is sometimes as the day and sometimes as the night. That is why the world is a hard place in which to live.

CHAPTER XXVI

- I. AND THERE WAS A FAMINE IN THE LAND, BESIDE THE FIRST FAMINE THAT WAS IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM, AND ISAAC WENT UNTO ABIMELECH KING OF THE PHILISTINES UNTO GERAR.

The opening words of the chapter imply a conscious attempt to relate it back to Gen. 12:10. A modern assumption that the story of Isaac's visit to Abimelech is due to a confusion in the tradition has gained popularity in recent years. It is argued that the redactor retained both versions of the story because of the lack of materials dealing with Isaac. However, the words *besides the first famine that was in the days of Abraham* suggest that the apparent repetition was done deliberately.

2. AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM, AND SAID, GO NOT DOWN INTO EGYPT: DWELL IN THE LAND WHICH I SHALL TELL THEE OF:

We are about to see Isaac's great journey. Both his father and his son go on journeys to Egypt, but Isaac is to go only as far as Gerar. There he will visit his father's old friend, Abimelech, whom we know to be a trustworthy man. From what will appear later in the texts, Isaac does not seem to know that Abimelech is an old friend of his father, but thinks the outing is quite an adventure, though it doesn't begin with the bold words with which Abraham's travels from Haran began.

3. SOJOURN IN THIS LAND AND I WILL BE WITH THEE, AND WILL BLESS THEE, FOR UNTO THEE, AND UNTO THY SEED, I WILL GIVE ALL THESE COUNTRIES, AND I WILL PERFORM THE OATH WHICH I SWARE UNTO ABRAHAM THY FATHER:
4. AND I WILL MAKE THY SEED TO MULTIPLY AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN, AND WILL GIVE UNTO THY SEED ALL THESE COUNTRIES; AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE NATIONS OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED;
5. BECAUSE THAT ABRAHAM OBEYED MY VOICE, AND KEPT MY CHARGE, MY COMMANDMENTS, MY STATUTES, AND MY LAWS.
6. AND ISAAC DWELT IN GERAR:

God had made many demands upon Abraham. He was told to leave his father's house, and God had once asked him to sacrifice his only son, and he was told to be perfect. Very little is asked of Isaac. He is placed in the hands of a noble man and told to remain quietly on the land. God promises to multiply his seed as the stars in the sky. The blessing which was given to Abraham included the simile of the sand as well (see commentary to Gen. 22:17), but God sees no reason to complicate Isaac's life by mentioning the other half of that blessing. And, of course, God drops the words referring to Israel's enemies altogether.

In Verses Three and Four God makes it clear that He will take care of Isaac and see that no harm befalls him and that his seed will become a great nation, if Isaac will do little to get in the way. But in Verse Five He makes it equally clear that all these gifts stem from the virtue of his father, Abraham. We shall

try to understand this relationship between fathers and sons in the commentary to Gen. 27:12.

7. AND THE MEN OF THE PLACE ASKED HIM OF HIS WIFE; AND HE SAID, SHE IS MY SISTER: FOR HE FEARED TO SAY, SHE IS MY WIFE; LEST, SAID HE, THE MEN OF THE PLACE SHOULD KILL ME FOR REBEKAH; BECAUSE SHE WAS FAIR TO LOOK UPON.

Abraham's agreement with Sarah that she should claim to be his sister was arranged prior to their entrance into Egypt and was done with calm forethought. Since Isaac made up his story only after the men asked him about his wife it is clear that he does not share his father's prudence.

8. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN HE HAD BEEN THERE A LONG TIME, THAT ABIMELECH KING OF THE PHILISTINES LOOKED OUT AT A WINDOW, AND SAW, AND, BEHOLD, ISAAC WAS SPORTING WITH REBEKAH HIS WIFE.

Isaac and Rebekah had been living peaceably at the home of Abimelech for some time. All of this while neither Abimelech nor his men, whom we know to be thieves, have bothered Rebekah. Now Sarah was called beautiful, as were Rachel and Joseph. But Rebekah was called good-looking, which may well have meant healthy-looking rather than beautiful. This assumption would account for the actions of Abimelech's men and be more in keeping with Isaac's needs. But since Bath-sheba is also called *good-looking* the point is moot.

In any case this verse demonstrates the difference between Pharaoh and Abimelech. Since Abimelech made no advances toward Rebekah it would seem that his advances toward Sarah came through love and not through what he considered to be his right as master of the house, as seems to have been true in the case of Pharaoh.

Isaac's plan was similar to that of Abraham, but he was not very clever. Although, as we have mentioned before, divine providence seems to play a much stronger role in the life of Isaac than it had in the life of Abraham, the present verse is an exception to that rule. To put it simply, Isaac gets caught. No plagues or night-dreams are necessary. For our observations on the way in which he was caught, see the commentary to Gen. 21:3.

During the whole of this chapter we must constantly bear in mind the serious problem. From the point of view of Chapter Twenty it appeared as though God, in choosing Abraham above Abimelech to become the founder of the New Way, had made a mistake. In Chapter Twenty-one we were forced to revise that opinion because of Abimelech's inadequacy when the problem of perpetuation was faced. It will therefore be necessary to compare Abimelech with Abraham's son in order to see the value of perpetuation.

9. AND ABIMELECH CALLED ISAAC, AND SAID, BEHOLD, OF A SURETY SHE IS THY WIFE: AND HOW SAIDST THOU, SHE IS MY SISTER? AND ISAAC SAID UNTO HIM, BECAUSE I SAID, LEST I DIE FOR HER.

Abimelech's reaction to Isaac is somewhat different from his reaction to Abraham under the same circumstances. In the earlier case he assumed that Abraham believed himself to have just cause for his action (Gen. 20:10–11). Here he makes no such supposition. However it is unclear whether the change in Abimelech was due to a loss of naiveté which he may have suffered through his encounter with Abraham or whether he was more impressed with Abraham and hence less likely to suspect his intentions. Our personal taste would lead us toward the second interpretation, but the point is again moot.

10. AND ABIMELECH SAID, WHAT IS THIS THOU HAS DONE TO US? ONE OF THE PEOPLE MIGHT LIGHTLY HAVE LAIN WITH THY WIFE, AND THOU SHOULDEST HAVE BROUGHT GUILTINESS UPON US.

Abimelech, as was mentioned in the commentary to Gen. 20:9, is still a king who seems to be more concerned for the welfare of his people than for his personal safety. He therefore asks: *what is this thou has done unto us?* Our commentary to Verse Seven seems to be strengthened by the fact that Abimelech does not even consider the possibility that he himself might have been led astray by Isaac's actions. He merely considers it possible that one of his people might have been so tempted.

11. AND ABIMELECH CHARGED ALL HIS PEOPLE, SAYING, HE THAT TOUCHETH THIS MAN OR HIS WIFE SHALL SURELY BE PUT TO DEATH.

This verse is the counterpart of Gen. 20:7 in which God made a similar threat, but here Abimelech himself is sufficient.

12. THEN ISAAC SOWED IN THAT LAND AND RECEIVED IN THE SAME YEAR AN HUNDREDFOLD: AND THE LORD BLESSED HIM.
13. AND THE MAN WAXED GREAT, AND WENT FORWARD, AND GREW UNTIL HE BECAME VERY GREAT.
14. FOR HE HAD POSSESSION OF FLOCKS, AND POSSESSION OF HERDS AND GREAT STORE OF SERVANTS: AND THE PHILISTINES ENVIED HIM.

These verses are most remarkable. No one of any note has been a farmer since the days of Cain except for Noah's momentary escapade. When Jacob decides to settle down and tie himself to the land, the results will again be disastrous (Gen. 33:17). God would not have stood for such behavior from any other man, but Isaac can do no wrong. In his blundering way he always succeeds and prospers a hundred-fold.

15. FOR ALL THE WELLS WHICH HIS FATHER'S SERVANTS HAD DIGGED IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM HIS FATHER, THE PHILISTINES HAD STOPPED THEM AND FILLED THEM WITH EARTH
16. AND ABIMELECH SAID UNTO ISAAC, GO FROM US; FOR THOU ART MUCH MIGHTIER THAN WE.
17. AND ISAAC DEPARTED THENCE, AND PITCHED HIS TENT IN THE VALLEY OF GERAR, AND DWELT THERE.
18. AND ISAAC DIGGED AGAIN THE WELLS OF WATER, WHICH THEY HAD DIGGED IN THE DAYS OF ABRAHAM HIS FATHER: FOR THE PHILISTINES HAD STOPPED THEM AFTER THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM: AND HE CALLED THEIR NAMES AFTER THE NAMES BY WHICH HIS FATHER HAD CALLED THEM.
19. AND ISAAC'S SERVANTS DIGGED IN THE VALLEY, AND FOUND THERE A WELL OF SPRINGWATER.
20. AND THE HERDMEN OF GERAR DID STRIVE WITH ISAAC'S HERDMEN, SAYING, THE WATER IS OURS: AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THE WELL ESEK; BECAUSE THEY STROVE WITH HIM.

Redigging his father's wells was the great act of Isaac's life. Since Abraham was never shown digging any wells we shall have to piece together the significance of that act from other sources. In Verse Twenty the herdsmen of Gerar justify their actions on the grounds that all the water belongs to them. Their statement would appear to be true in a most radical sense. These men are Philistines, and throughout the Bible the Philistines have been shown to be lords and masters of the watery realm. But Israel, too, is in need of water. The wells, which form a small passageway back to the waters of chaos, provide in just measure life-giving substance. The goal of tradition is to limit and channel the waters of chaos, but to close them off would mean death. Isaac is not a builder of traditions any more than he is a man who can sink a new well. But he can keep the New Way alive.

21. AND THEY DIGGED ANOTHER WELL, AND STROVE FOR THAT ALSO: AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF IT SITNAH.
22. AND HE REMOVED FROM THENCE, AND DIGGED ANOTHER WELL; AND FOR THAT THEY STROVE NOT: AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF IT REHOBOTH; AND HE SAID, FOR NOW THE LORD HATH MADE ROOM FOR US, AND WE SHALL BE FRUITFUL IN THE LAND.
23. AND HE WENT UP FROM THENCE TO BEER-SHEBA.

In these verses Isaac's one great virtue comes to the foreground. He keeps digging the wells which his father had dug, keeping the channels open. He calls them by the same name that his father had called them, and in spite of all opposition he keeps right on digging and clearing. Note that Abimelech's men are still thieves. He has no obedient son to carry on his virtues.

24. AND THE LORD APPEARED UNTO HIM THE SAME NIGHT, AND SAID, I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM THY FATHER: FEAR NOT, FOR I AM WITH THEE, AND WILL BLESS THEE, AND MULTIPLY THY SEED FOR MY SERVANT ABRAHAM'S SAKE.
25. AND HE BUILDED AN ALTAR THERE, AND CALLED UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD, AND PITCHED HIS TENT THERE: AND THERE ISAAC'S SERVANTS DIGGED A WELL.

Isaac has passed his test with flying colors. We are beginning to see the force of Verse Five. If it were not for Abraham there would have been no wells to keep clean, and Isaac is not quite the man to go out and dig a new well. But he will certainly do for present purposes.

26. THEN ABIMELECH WENT TO HIM FROM GERAR, AND AHUZZATH ONE OF HIS FRIENDS, AND PHICHOL THE CHIEF CAPTAIN OF HIS ARMY.
27. AND ISAAC SAID UNTO THEM, WHEREFORE COME YE TO ME, SEEING YE HATE ME, AND HAVE SENT ME AWAY FROM YOU?
28. AND THEY SAID, WE SAW CERTAINLY THAT THE LORD WAS WITH THEE: AND WE SAID, LET THERE BE NOW AN OATH BETWIXT US, EVEN BETWIXT US AND THEE, AND LET US MAKE A COVENANT WITH THEE:
29. THAT THOU WILT DO US NO HURT, AS WE HAVE NOT TOUCHED THEE, AND AS WE HAVE DONE UNTO THEE NOTHING BUT GOOD, AND HAVE SENT THEE AWAY IN PEACE: THOU ART NOW THE BLESSED OF THE LORD.

Abimelech seems to have understood the full power of Isaac's apparently foolish actions. In Verse Twenty-nine he shows that he understands what it means to be *blessed of the lord* even though he himself is not so blessed. Somehow he has seen that Abraham succeeded in the one crucial point where he himself failed. Abraham was able to establish a house and a tradition, but Abimelech's great virtues are to die with him.

30. AND HE MADE THEM A FEAST, AND THEY DID EAT AND DRINK.
31. AND THEY ROSE UP BETIMES IN THE MORNING, AND SWARE ONE TO ANOTHER: AND ISAAC SENT THEM AWAY AND THEY DEPARTED FROM HIM IN PEACE.
32. AND IT CAME TO PASS THE SAME DAY, THAT ISAAC'S SERVANTS CAME, AND TOLD HIM CONCERNING THE WELL WHICH THEY HAD DIGGED, AND SAID UNTO HIM, WE HAVE FOUND WATER.

Peace is now established between Abimelech and Isaac, and each will go his own way. The story ends as all good stories do, with a happy ending—Isaac has found water.

33. AND HE CALLED IT SHEBAH: THEREFORE THE NAME OF THE CITY IS BEER-SHEBA UNTO THIS DAY.

Isaac's one great deed has been accomplished, and he returns to Beer-Sheba where he will be a blind old man when we next see him. As was pointed out in the commentary to Gen. 22:19 Beer-Sheba continually marks the limits of the New Way, and the old man's active life has come to an end.

34. AND ESAU WAS FORTY YEARS OLD WHEN HE TOOK TO WIFE JUDITH THE DAUGHTER OF BEERI THE HITTITE, AND BASHMATH THE DAUGHTER OF ELON THE HITTITE:

35. WHICH WERE A GRIEF OF MIND UNTO ISAAC AND TO REBEKAH.

We shall give an account of Esau's descendants in the commentary to Chapter Thirty-six.

CHAPTER XXVII

I. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT WHEN ISAAC WAS OLD, AND HIS EYES WERE DIM, SO THAT HE COULD NOT SEE, HE CALLED ESAU HIS ELDEST SON, AND SAID UNTO HIM, MY SON: AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, BEHOLD, HERE AM I.

Isaac is described as an old man and has lost what even in Biblical terms is the highest of the senses. Isaac's blindness is a fitting culmination to his life, and it has been part of his character since the beginning. He has been led by his father in the New Way, and in this chapter he will be led by the wisdom of Rebekah in ways which he will not fully understand.

The conversation between Abraham and Isaac at the top of Mount Moriah went as follows:

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father; and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? (Gen. 22:7)

The conversation between Isaac and Esau is a strange parody on that verse in which Isaac plays the role of the son and Esau the role of the father. Verse Eighteen will contain another parody which we must consider further.

2. AND HE SAID, BEHOLD NOW, I AM OLD, I KNOW NOT THE DAY OF MY DEATH:
3. NOW THEREFORE TAKE, I PRAY THEE, THY WEAPONS, THY QUIVER AND THY BOW, AND GO OUT TO THE FIELD, AND TAKE ME SOME VENISON;
4. AND MAKE ME SAVOURY MEAT SUCH AS I LOVE, AND BRING IT TO ME, THAT I MAY EAT; THAT MY SOUL MAY BLESS THEE BEFORE I DIE.

Verse Two cannot but remind one of the first verse of Chapter Twenty-four, but the circumstances are different. The old man, Abraham, was busy making plans for sending the servant off to fetch a wife for Isaac. In the present case that activity is replaced by a blessing.

In Verse Four Isaac reveals that he is somehow aware of his own position.

He will eat the venison, but *his soul* will bless Esau. It is as if the old man saw that what was blessing his son was not he himself but something that lived through him.

In the commentary to Gen. 2:5 we discussed two Hebrew words, both of which are translated *before*. Isaac considers himself about to die though, as we shall see in what follows, he will live on for another eighty years. In Verse Seven Rebekah will correct Isaac's statement by using the other word, which does not have the significance of immediacy which this has.

5. AND REBEKAH HEARD WHEN ISAAC SPAKE TO ESAU HIS SON. AND ESAU WENT TO THE FIELD TO HUNT FOR VENISON AND TO BRING IT.
6. AND REBEKAH SPAKE UNTO JACOB HER SON SAYING, BEHOLD, I HEARD THY FATHER SPEAK UNTO ESAU THY BROTHER, SAYING,
7. BRING ME VENISON, AND MAKE ME SAVOURY MEAT, THAT I MAY EAT, AND BLESS THEE BEFORE THE LORD BEFORE MY DEATH.
8. NOW THEREFORE, MY SON, OBEY MY VOICE ACCORDING TO THAT WHICH I COMMAND THEE.

Rebekah in her masterful way will now take charge of the arrangements. She is aware of God's plan (Gen. 25:23), but has a loving understanding of each member of her own family including Esau, which will emerge as the present chapter develops. In spite of, or more precisely because of that love and understanding, she realizes that Esau is not the man to carry on the New Way. Her care and love for Isaac lead her to believe that to deceive him would be better than to make him face his own failure to understand his sons.

9. GO NOW TO THE FLOCK, AND FETCH ME FROM THENCE TWO GOOD KIDS OF THE SHE-GOATS; AND I WILL MAKE THEM SAVOURY MEAT FOR THY FATHER, SUCH AS HE LOVETH:
10. AND THOU SHALT BRING IT TO THY FATHER, THAT HE MAY EAT, AND THAT HE MAY BLESS THEE BEFORE HIS DEATH.

Rebekah has been cooking Isaac's food for many years and knows his likes and dislikes perfectly. Who but she could cook such a meal? Out of respect for her husband she chooses *kids of a she-goat* which as was explained in the commentary to Gen. 15:9 are associated with the ruler.

11. AND JACOB SAID TO REBEKAH HIS MOTHER, BEHOLD, ESAU MY BROTHER IS A HAIRY MAN, AND I AM A SMOOTH MAN:
12. MY FATHER PERADVENTURE WILL FEEL ME, AND I SHALL SEEM TO HIM AS A DECEIVER; AND I SHALL BRING A CURSE UPON ME, AND NOT A BLESSING.

Jacob fears that his father will want to touch him. The chapter is built out of a constant play on the senses which we shall see develop. One may begin to

wonder at this point why such a fuss is made about the blessing of a blind old man. This question raises many difficulties which appear in the most central positions of the Torah and which have been greatly misunderstood over the centuries. The problems first arise in what is known as the *Second Commandment*. God's jealousy leads Him to *visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children until the third and fourth generation of them that hate me and show kindness unto the thousandth (generation) of those who love me and keep my commandments* (Ex. 20:5, 6). The context for this statement about the relation of fathers to sons is a warning against idolatry. It begins with the words *thou shalt have no other gods before Me*. God's vengefulness in the sense here described is strictly related to the warning concerning other gods. The passage is also repeated in the Book of Deuteronomy, 5:9, practically verbatim.

In the Book of Exodus Moses once asked God to allow him to see His face. God said that no man could see His face and live. Instead of showing Moses His face, God showed Moses His back, that is to say His effects. The passage reads as follows:

And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation. (Ex. 34:5-7)

In Ex. 34:7 God's jealousy is described again. But this time it is no longer merely a part of a particular commandment. In this verse jealousy emerges as the closest that Moses will ever come to knowing the essence of God Himself. We must try to find out what these words mean.

In a different context, when God is giving the laws concerning individual men and their individual actions, whether it be stealing or killing or perverting the judgment of the stranger, He says:

The fathers shall not be put to death for the children. Neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: but each man shall be put to death for his own sin: (Deut. 24:16)

This is certainly the law for men and this is the law that was put into practice (See II Kings 14:6), but how shall we understand that jealousy which is so essential to God's being?

Sometime after God had revealed his essence as being jealousy in the double sense of punishment and care, the people revolted because of their fear of the giants (See commentary to Gen. 14:4). God at that time was about to destroy the people when Moses reminded Him of His promise, and His jealousy was used to save the people.

It must first be noted that the statement is always in the plural and never

used for the detriment of an individual person because of the individual sin of his own father. The passage speaks of a whole generation which suffers because of the mistakes of the previous generation. It would be hard to live in our present world without seeing the truth of this warning. The statement is directed not to the sons but to the fathers, warning them that their errors may lead their children to suffer either because they have lost the way or because they find themselves in circumstances not entirely of their own making. The statement is indeed close to the essence of Biblical thought. The claim is that if a foundation is poorly laid its effect will only last for a few generations but that if well laid it will prosper for a thousand. The author surely does not mean that there will be no ups and downs, but the claim is that this solidity, once established, can be easily revived.

13. AND HIS MOTHER SAID UNTO HIM, UPON ME BE THY CURSE, MY SON ONLY OBEY MY VOICE, AND GO FETCH ME THEM.
14. AND HE WENT, AND FETCHED, AND BROUGHT THEM TO HIS MOTHER:
AND HIS MOTHER MADE SAVOURY MEAT, SUCH AS HIS FATHER LOVED.
15. AND REBEKAH TOOK GOODLY RAIMENT OF HER ELDEST SON ESAU, WHICH WERE WITH HER IN THE HOUSE, AND PUT THEM UPON JACOB HER YOUNGER SON:
16. AND SHE PUT THE SKINS OF THE KIDS OF THE GOATS UPON HIS HANDS AND UPON THE SMOOTH OF HIS NECK:
17. AND SHE GAVE THE SAVOURY MEAT AND THE BREAD, WHICH SHE HAD PREPARED, INTO THE HAND OF HER SON JACOB.
18. AND HE CAME UNTO HIS FATHER, AND SAID, MY FATHER: AND HE SAID, HERE AM I; WHO ART THOU, MY SON?

How different Verse Eighteen is from the uses of the words *Here am I* that we have seen up till now. In the commentary to Gen. 22:1 we described them as showing full awareness and readiness to care for another. They were words of certainty when God used them at the time of the Flood. After reading Abraham's reassuring words *Here am I* addressed to his son Isaac, how pitiful it is to read the words *Here am I, who art thou, my son?*

19. AND JACOB SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, I AM ESAU THY FIRSTBORN; I HAVE DONE ACCORDING AS THOU BADEST ME: ARISE, I PRAY THEE SIT AND EAT OF MY VENISON, THAT THY SOUL MAY BLESS ME.
20. AND ISAAC SAID UNTO HIS SON, HOW IS IT THAT THOU HAS FOUND IT SO QUICKLY, MY SON? AND HE SAID, BECAUSE THE LORD THY GOD BROUGHT IT TO ME.

Jacob's words are not a complete lie. In fact they are more truthful than Abraham's lie to Abimelech. Jacob received the birthright from Esau at the end of the last chapter, and for present purposes he is the man most appropriately

known by the name *thy firstborn*, whereas Abraham was not the man whom Abimelech would primarily understand to be the brother of Sarah. Through the wise intervention and cooperation of Rebekah, even Verse Twenty is not a lie in the deepest sense.

21. AND ISAAC SAID UNTO JACOB, COME NEAR, I PRAY THEE, THAT I MAY FEEL THEE MY SON, WHETHER THOU BE MY VERY SON ESAU OR NOT.
22. AND JACOB WENT NEAR UNTO ISAAC HIS FATHER; AND HE FELT HIM, AND SAID, THE VOICE IS JACOB'S VOICE, BUT THE HANDS ARE THE HANDS OF ESAU.
23. AND HE DISCERNED HIM NOT, BECAUSE HIS HANDS WERE HAIRY, AS HIS BROTHER ESAU'S HANDS: SO HE BLESSED HIM.

Having lost his sense of sight, Isaac chooses to trust his sense of touch rather than his sense of hearing. The word which has been translated *felt* generally means *to grope*, and implies confusion (See Deut. 28:29). The text describes a downward motion from the most reliable of our senses to the least trustworthy: from sight, to hearing, to touch.

24. AND HE SAID ART THOU MY VERY SON ESAU? AND HE SAID, I AM.
25. AND HE SAID, BRING IT NEAR TO ME AND I WILL EAT OF MY SON'S VENISON, THAT MY SOUL MAY BLESS THEE. AND HE BROUGHT IT NEAR TO HIM, AND HE DID EAT: AND HE BROUGHT HIM WINE, AND HE DRANK.

Isaac has eaten the sheep believing it to be the venison. He is again fooled by his senses. Strangely enough, the one sense which seems to be operating well is the one sense to which Isaac pays no attention, his sense of hearing. Given his position one would have expected Isaac to rely most heavily on that sense. If the story of Isaac concerns itself mainly with the continuity of tradition one would have expected the sense of hearing to be the most important. But not all generations listen, and the question is whether the New Way can bury itself deeply enough into the soul of the people that it can live through such generations.

On the use of wine see the commentary to Gen. 9:20.

26. AND HIS FATHER ISAAC SAID UNTO HIM, COME NEAR NOW, AND KISS ME, MY SON.
27. AND HE CAME NEAR, AND KISSED HIM: AND HE SMELLED THE SMELL OF HIS RAIMENT, AND BLESSED HIM, AND SAID, SEE, THE SMELL OF MY SON IS AS THE SMELL OF A FIELD WHICH THE LORD HATH BLESSED.

Isaac is now operating on the lowest of the senses—the sense of smell, and yet due to the well-laid plans of Abraham, God, and Rebekah, everything is going perfectly according to plan.

28. THEREFORE GOD GIVE THEE OF THE DEW OF HEAVEN, AND THE FATNESS OF THE EARTH, AND PLENTY OF CORN AND WINE:
29. LET PEOPLE SERVE THEE, AND NATIONS BOW DOWN TO THEE: BE LORD OVER THY BRETHREN, AND LET THY MOTHER'S SONS BOW DOWN TO THEE: CURSED BE EVERY ONE THAT CURSETH THEE, AND BLESSED BE HE THAT BLESSETH THEE.

Isaac's blessing is curious. There are two sets of words which in Hebrew go together like *bread and butter*. One set is *milk and honey* and the other set, which one finds less often, is *corn and wine*. Isaac chooses to give Jacob the blessing of a farmer rather than the blessing of a shepherd, as a result of what was pointed out in the commentary to Gen. 26:12. The example of corn and wine is often used as an example of what God may or may not bless depending on the behaviour of Israel. But there is only one passage in which it itself is used to symbolize a blessing, yet the passage is not a very pleasant one since it was used by a Syrian emissary at the time of Hezekiah in an attempt to persuade the men of Israel to give up the battle and become subject to Syrian force (II Kings 18:32).

30. AND IT CAME TO PASS, AS SOON AS ISAAC HAD MADE AN END OF BLESSING JACOB, AND JACOB WAS YET SCARCE GONE OUT FROM THE PRESENCE OF ISAAC HIS FATHER, THAT ESAU HIS BROTHER CAME IN FROM HIS HUNTING.
31. AND HE ALSO HAD MADE SAVOURY MEAT, AND BROUGHT IT UNTO HIS FATHER, AND SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, LET MY FATHER ARISE, AND EAT OF HIS SON'S VENISON, THAT THY SOUL MAY BLESS ME.
32. AND ISAAC HIS FATHER SAID UNTO HIM, WHO ART THOU? AND HE SAID, I AM THY SON, THY FIRSTBORN ESAU.
33. AND ISAAC TREMBLED VERY EXCEEDINGLY, AND SAID, WHO? WHERE IS HE THAT HATH TAKEN VENISON, AND BROUGHT IT ME, AND I HAVE EATEN OF ALL BEFORE THOU CAMEST, AND HAVE BLESSED HIM? YEA, AND HE SHALL BE BLESSED.
34. AND WHEN ESAU HEARD THE WORDS OF HIS FATHER, HE CRIED WITH A GREAT AND EXCEEDING BITTER CRY, AND SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, BLESS ME, EVEN ME ALSO, O MY FATHER!

In Verse Thirty-two, as in Verse Eighteen, the old man says, *who art thou?* He is confused about which son is which.

Verse Thirty-four is difficult to translate because of a certain play on words in it. The root of the word for *crying* used in the verse is one of those roots which we have discussed in the commentary to Gen. 21:3, and so the words *and he cried* sound very much like the word for laughter, and hence like the name of his father, Isaac. In Verse Thirty-four the author says: *And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even also me, O my father.* At this point in

the text the words *crying*, *laughter*, *Isaac*, and *father* all become jumbled into one word, and the full irony of the ambiguity of Isaac's name comes completely into light. Esau's pitiable clumsiness and Isaac's blindness are all part of his name.

35. AND HE SAID, THY BROTHER CAME WITH SUBTILTY, AND HATH TAKEN AWAY THY BLESSING.
36. AND HE SAID, IS NOT HE RIGHTLY NAMED JACOB? FOR HE HATH SUPPLANTED ME THESE TWO TIMES: HE TOOK AWAY MY BIRTHRIGHT; AND, BEHOLD, NOW HE HATH TAKEN AWAY MY BLESSING. AND HE SAID, HAST THOU NOT RESERVED A BLESSING FOR ME?
37. AND ISAAC ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO ESAU, BEHOLD, I HAVE MADE HIM THY LORD, AND ALL HIS BRETHREN HAVE I GIVEN TO HIM FOR SERVANTS; AND WITH CORN AND WINE HAVE SUSTAINED HIM: AND WHAT SHALL I DO NOW UNTO THEE, MY SON?
38. AND ESAU SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, HAST THOU BUT ONE BLESSING, MY FATHER? BLESS ME, EVEN ME ALSO, O MY FATHER. AND ESAU LIFTED UP HIS VOICE, AND WEPT.

Isaac and Esau now have and have not understood what has happened. Esau gives an interpretation of Jacob's name consciously whereas his unconscious explanation of the name Isaac may have been much more insightful.

Esau's weeping is not described by the word used for his cry. It has been used twice before in the text, once when Abraham *wept* at the death of Sarah and once when Hagar was left with Ishmael in the desert. As we shall see when we consider the character of Joseph, weeping is the highest of the passions from the point of view of the Book of Genesis. While Esau's weeping may not be the highest form of that passion it is certainly close enough to command our respect. In Verse Thirty-eight Esau uses the word *father* three times. As we shall see in the next chapter the constant repetition of this word as he is about to weep reveals Esau's devotion to his father which sets him apart from Ishmael. Esau's devotion to his father is one half of the paradoxical nature of his character. He is almost desperately in need of the ties to his own immediate father. On the other hand, he is a man of the fields—a man who requires nothing. This near paradox captures the sense in which Esau is like *evening* (see commentary to Gen. 25:23).

Esau was an unplanned and almost accidental mixture between Jacob and Ishmael. The problem in his character is the problem which God had referred to in answer to Rebekah's question in Gen. 25:22. He defies the sharp distinction which we have made between the New Way and the blessed way of Ishmael. The problem is further complicated by the fact that his devotion is to his immediate father Isaac, and hence he is rather incapable of seeing beyond Isaac to the principles of his original father, Abraham, which are fully seen by

Rebekah and implemented by Jacob. Isaac's preference for Esau may be part of his lack of full awareness of that which he and only he can carry and perpetuate. A fuller understanding of this distinction will have to wait until the next chapter.

39. AND ISAAC HIS FATHER ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM BEHOLD, THY DWELLING SHALL BE THE FATNESS OF THE EARTH, AND OF THE DEW OF HEAVEN FROM ABOVE;
40. AND BY THY SWORD SHALT THOU LIVE, AND SHALT SERVE THY BROTHER; AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS WHEN THOU SHALT HAVE THE DOMINION, THAT THOU SHALT BREAK HIS YOKE FROM OFF THY NECK.

It is difficult to understand in what sense Esau will *break the yoke from off his neck*. These words may refer to a wonderful day in the future when the problems of man caused by the mixture of good and bad will be solved. That is to say, it may refer to the fulfillment of the promise which the New Way holds out to the whole of mankind. On the other hand, historically speaking, the Edomites, who were the descendants of Esau, only gained their freedom from Israel at the time Israel became a vassal of the Assyrians (II Kings 16:6). Even to consider this interpretation would be to assume that the Book of Genesis was written after the fall of Jerusalem. However, we have not yet established the author's date, and therefore we shall have to hold the interpretation in abeyance. It does, however, show the necessity for establishing the date of publication, and we shall face the problem in the commentary to Gen. 28:19.

41. AND ESAU HATED JACOB BECAUSE OF THE BLESSING WHEREWITH HIS FATHER BLESSED HIM: AND ESAU SAID IN HIS HEART, THE DAYS OF MOURNING FOR MY FATHER ARE AT HAND; THEN WILL I SLAY MY BROTHER JACOB.
42. AND THESE WORDS OF ESAU HER ELDER SON WERE TOLD TO REBEKAH: AND SHE SENT AND CALLED JACOB HER YOUNGER SON, AND SAID UNTO HIM, BEHOLD, THY BROTHER ESAU, AS TOUCHING THEE, DOTHS COMFORT HIMSELF, PURPOSING TO KILL THEE.
43. NOW THEREFORE MY SON, OBEY MY VOICE; AND ARISE, FLEE THEE THOU TO LABAN MY BROTHER TO HARAN;
44. AND TARRY WITH HIM A FEW DAYS, UNTIL THY BROTHER'S FURY TURN AWAY;
45. UNTIL THY BROTHER'S ANGER TURN AWAY FROM THEE, AND HE FORGET THAT WHICH THOU HAST DONE TO HIM: THEN I WILL SEND, AND FETCH THEE FROM THENCE: WHY SHOULD I BE DEPRIVED ALSO OF YOU BOTH IN ONE DAY?

Esau, as we know, is a man of quick passion. His respect for his father will not allow him to kill Jacob until the old man is dead, but he is utterly convinced that one day he will kill his brother. Rebekah however shows no great

concern. She advises Jacob to go to her brother's for a few days because she knows that Esau's passion is a temporary matter and that he will soon calm down. Unlike Isaac, Rebekah sees with great clarity both the weaknesses and the virtues of those whom she loves.

At the end of Verse Forty-five, when it is a personal matter of the death of her two sons and no longer a matter of carrying on the New Way, Rebekah shows in her care no distinction between Jacob and Esau. She is not primarily worried about the death of Jacob but fears that she will be deprived of both of them on one day.

46. AND REBEKAH SAID TO ISAAC I AM WEARY OF MY LIFE BECAUSE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF HETH: IF JACOB TAKE A WIFE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF HETH, SUCH AS THESE WHICH ARE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND, WHAT GOOD SHALL MY LIFE DO ME?

Rebekah sees no reason to cause her husband any worry or pain about what has happened between their two sons. She acts as if nothing had happened and gives Isaac a totally different reason for sending Jacob away.

CHAPTER XXVIII

1. AND ISAAC CALLED JACOB, AND BLESSED HIM AND CHARGED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT NOT TAKE A WIFE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CANAAN.
2. ARISE, GO TO PADAN-ARAM, TO THE HOUSE OF BETHUEL THY MOTHER'S FATHER; AND TAKE THEE A WIFE FROM THENCE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF LABAN THY MOTHER'S BROTHER.

The following two chapters are obviously intended as a counterpart to the search for Isaac's wife in Chapters Twenty-four and Twenty-five. In them Jacob will take himself a wife just as we had seen Isaac being provided with a wife. In Verse Six of Chapter Twenty-four Abraham insisted that under no circumstances was Isaac to return to Padan-aram. But in the beginning of this chapter Isaac sends his son to that same country in order to find his own wife.

Verse Two is almost an inversion of the beginning of Chapter Twelve. Isaac is sending Jacob back to all those places from which God had sent Abraham. In the light of Abraham's warning one hardly knows which is the more dangerous journey, and which will take more courage.

3. AND GOD ALMIGHTY BLESS THEE, AND MAKE THEE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY THEE, THAT THOU MAYEST BE A CONGREGATION OF PEOPLES;
4. AND GIVE THEE THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM, TO THEE, AND TO THY SEED WITH THEE; THAT THOU MAYEST INHERIT THE LAND WHEREIN THOU ART A STRANGER, WHICH GOD GAVE UNTO ABRAHAM.

We have discussed the term *God almighty* in the commentary to Gen. 17:1.

In Verse Three Isaac blesses Jacob and says that he shall become a *congregation of peoples*. The blessing is part of Isaac's two-sided virtue/vice. He repeats to Jacob the blessing which would have been appropriate for himself but which is not completely fitting in the case of Jacob. That error may be related to his position as a mere repository of tradition. Isaac had two sons, both of whom will beget great nations. It would have been appropriate for Isaac to receive a blessing containing the word *peoples* in the plural, but Jacob's blessing should have read *people* in the singular.

The problem involving Isaac's use of the plural is rather difficult because there are several ways of interpreting it. One alternative, which would speak against what we have just said, is that Isaac may have envisaged the possibility of that loosely connected nation of tribes found in the Book of Judges which had been the original plan for Israel until the necessity of a king became apparent. On the other hand if the blessing was an error on the part of Isaac the author may have intended it ironically since Israel was divided into two peoples by the revolution which occurred after the reign of King Solomon.

5. AND ISAAC SENT AWAY JACOB: AND HE WENT TO PADAN-ARAM UNTO LABAN, SON OF BETHUEL THE SYRIAN, THE BROTHER OF REBEKAH, JACOB'S AND ESAU'S MOTHER.
6. WHEN ESAU SAW THAT ISAAC HAD BLESSED JACOB, AND SENT HIM AWAY TO PADAN-ARAM, TO TAKE HIM A WIFE FROM THENCE; AND THAT AS HE BLESSED HIM HE GAVE HIM A CHARGE, SAYING THOU SHALT NOT TAKE A WIFE OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CANAAN;
7. AND THAT JACOB OBEYED HIS FATHER AND HIS MOTHER, AND WAS GONE TO PADAN-ARAM;
8. AND ESAU SEEING THAT THE DAUGHTERS OF CANAAN PLEASSED NOT ISAAC HIS FATHER;
9. THEN WENT ESAU UNTO ISHMAEL, AND TOOK UNTO THE WIVES WHICH HE HAD MAHALATH THE DAUGHTER OF ISHMAEL ABRAHAM'S SON, THE SISTER OF NEBAJOTH, TO BE HIS WIFE.

Esau's devotion to his father Isaac is touching, but a comparison of Verses Seven and Eight reveals that Esau's great devotion to his father does not extend to his mother. However since Rebekah is more in contact with what is most important in Abraham, the indication is that Esau's respect for his father fails to include that which is most important in him. While something of that nature may be said of Isaac himself it would only mean that the test through which Isaac has been put cannot continue forever. The New Way, while it is strong enough to lie dormant for a while, must be renewed from time to time, and Esau seems to be incapable of that renewal precisely because of his strong devotion to his immediate father. We shall have to see what other alternative there is in the next chapters.

10. AND JACOB WENT OUT FROM BEER-SHEBA, AND WENT TOWARD HARAN.

11. AND HE LIGHTED UPON THE PLACE, AND TARRIED THERE ALL NIGHT, BECAUSE THE SUN WAS SET; AND HE TOOK OF THE STONES OF THE PLACE, AND PUT THEM FOR HIS PILLOWS, AND LAY DOWN IN THAT PLACE TO SLEEP.

Jacob has set out on the long and fearful journey which appropriately began from the city of Beer-sheba. In the commentary to Gen. 22:19 Beer-sheba turned out to be the border *par excellence*. Jacob, in leaving from Beer-sheba, enters that endless world of the outside.

Verse Eleven literally begins *He met up with the place*. It is peculiar that the definite article should be used with the word *place* as if there were only one place in the world in which the following chapter could have occurred. This feeling is underlined by the fact that the words *the place* or *that place* are used no less than three times in this one sentence alone and will appear six times in the chapter as a whole. By using the definite article the author creates a suspense which will only be broken in Verse Nineteen.

Jacob's dream begins after sunset just as Abraham's dream in Chapter Fifteen had. It would be wise to recall precisely what that dream taught Abraham. From it Abraham learned that the Promised Land was not an uninhabited paradise waiting for his arrival. He learned that it was an inhabited country which his descendants would not even see until they had endured four hundred years of slavery in Egypt and forty years of arduous travel through the wild and barren country of Sinai. He also realized that many wars would be fought in its establishment. These are the things that Abraham learned after *the sun went down*.

Jacob does not lay his head directly on the ground but places it on a rock. The significance of the rock will be discussed at length in the commentary to Verse Eighteen.

12. AND HE DREAMED, AND BEHOLD A LADDER SET UP ON THE EARTH, AND THE TOP OF IT REACHING TOWARD HEAVEN. AND BEHOLD THE ANGELS OF GOD ASCENDING AND DESCENDING ON IT.

While on his journey, Jacob had a dream in which he saw angels. Until now God Himself was never more connected with heaven than he was with the earth. He created each and was called *Professor* of both. Many times in the past, heaven, or perhaps it would be better to say *the sky*, has had the connotation as the home of the chaotic waters and hence the place from which God sent the waters of the Flood and the fire which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. The angels on the other hand have often been identified with heaven (See Gen. 21:17, 22:11, and 22:15). But Verse Thirteen of the present chapter will be the first verse to associate God Himself unambiguously with heaven.

It would be wise at this point to consider the appearances of angels in the text in an attempt to get some glimpse of what an angel is. First it must be

said that we may be doing an injustice to the text by using the word *angel*. The Hebrew uses the normal every-day word for a *messenger*.

In general angels appear to ordinary human beings whom one does not normally think of as being the highest leaders in Israel. The list includes Hagar, Lot, Balaam, Gideon, and the wife of Manoah, the father of Samson. Only once before had an angel appeared to a major character. Abraham's last communication with God was through the medium of an angel, but as we saw at that time it indicated the beginning of the final stage of Abraham's life.

The next time an angel of the Lord will meet a major character, aside from a fleeting glance in Gen. 32:2, will be in Exodus 3:2 in which an angel of the Lord will appear to Moses from the burning bush. From that point on Moses will speak with God directly. Moses' encounter with the angel will be a counterpart to Abraham's. To Moses, the angel is an introduction which balances the separation implied in the scene with Abraham.

Only one other angel plays a major role in the development of the New Way. After the revolt of the Golden Calf there was a necessary separation between God and the people which we have discussed at some length (See commentary to Gen. 20:7 *et en passant*). When God made his decision to keep Himself from the people, He sent His angel to lead the way.

2. And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite: 3. Unto a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiffnecked people; lest I consume thee in the way. 4. And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned: and no man did put on him his ornaments.
(Ex. 33:2, 3, 4)

13. AND, BEHOLD, THE LORD STOOD ABOVE IT, AND SAID, I AM THE LORD
GOD OF ABRAHAM THY FATHER, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC: THE LAND WHEREON
THOU LIEST TO THEE WILL I GIVE IT, AND TO THY SEED:

God is pictured as standing at the very top of a high ladder while Jacob lies on the ground. God and man have never been so separated in the book before, and yet messengers constantly keep the two in contact. The distance between man and God which we see at this point will have a radical effect on the remainder of Genesis. In the past God spoke freely with many men. From this point on he will almost never speak, and the few words he does speak reflect rather than relieve this silence. The *man* with whom Jacob shall wrestle in Chapter Thirty-two appears to be some manifestation of God, but there are only three instances in which God will speak in his own voice to Jacob again. In Gen. 35:1 there will be a short verse telling Jacob to return to the place of his dream. But, when Jacob returns, God will do nothing more than repeat the blessing He had given before. In Chapter Forty-six, Verse Two, God will make the separation clear in one verse by sending Jacob down into Egypt, where

there will be no direct communication between God and man for four hundred years.

14. AND THY SEED SHALL BE AS THE DUST OF THE EARTH, AND THOU SHALT SPREAD ABROAD TO THE WEST, AND TO THE EAST, AND TO THE NORTH, AND TO THE SOUTH: AND IN THEE AND IN THY SEED SHALL ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH BE BLESSED.

15. AND, BEHOLD, I AM WITH THEE. AND WILL KEEP THEE IN ALL PLACES WHITHER THOU GOEST, AND WILL BRING THEE AGAIN INTO THIS LAND; FOR I WILL NOT LEAVE THEE UNTIL I HAVE DONE THAT WHICH I HAVE SPOKEN TO THEE OF.

Jacob receives only the other half of the blessing, the half which his father did not receive. He is blessed as *the dust of the earth* (See commentary to Gen. 26:4). This indicates that he will be forced to face many of the difficulties from which his father was protected.

Jacob is lying on the ground sprawled out, as low as man could lie. God is at the very top of a high ladder which has its foundation on the earth and as the text says *reaches in a heavenly direction*. The angels seem to be a promise that in spite of this great distance there will always be some connection between God and Jacob, or Israel. This is the sense in which we ought to understand Verse Fifteen, in which God promised that he would be *with* Jacob, that he will *keep* Jacob, and that he will *not leave* Jacob.

16. AND JACOB AWAKED OUT OF HIS SLEEP, AND HE SAID, SURELY THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE; AND I KNEW IT NOT.

In this context we can well understand why it is that God may be present and yet not at first be perceived by human beings. This is the first time in the Bible that any man has ever made such a remark, and perhaps this is Jacob's great test in the sense that Isaac's stay with Abimelech was his test. In Isaac and Jacob we can see two very different men, both of whom play a role after the death of the founder; Isaac, through whom the tradition can pass, and Jacob, who is keenly aware of the presence of things that no longer appear on the surface.

17. AND HE WAS AFRAID, AND SAID, HOW DREADFUL IS THIS PLACE. THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

The fear which Jacob felt at that moment was a new feeling never felt before by mankind. It was certainly not the fear which arises from guilt as in the case of Man or of Sarah. Nor was it the fear of a coward in the face of evil men (Gen. 19:30), nor is it simply the *fear of God* in the sense of one who obeys the laws of decency (Gen. 20:11). The fear which Jacob felt was the sudden realization of his place within a vast universe and the great distance between

him and the highest. Such a feeling will again be felt by Moses at the sight of the burning bush and also by the people at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses will one day overcome that gap, but the people will have to have that gap closed for them by the Prophets, the priests, and the kings.

It should now be clear in what sense God has taken up residence in the heaven and why Jacob is now in need of a gate. I believe that in the next verse we shall get a clearer indication as to the meaning of *gate*. However it is not yet clear why Jacob insists upon the location of the *the place*.

18. AND JACOB ROSE UP EARLY IN THE MORNING, AND TOOK THE STONE THAT HE HAD PUT FOR HIS PILLOWS, AND SET IT UP FOR A PILLAR, AND Poured OIL UPON THE TOP OF IT.

Jacob's reaction to what he has seen is curious. He anoints the stone which he had used as a pillow. The stone on which he rests his head may be a reference to the stone on which Moses wrote the laws or it may be a reference to the general solidity of tradition, but one thing is clear; the word which is translated to *pour* is not the normal word used for *anointed*. Nonetheless it is used when Aaron was anointed to be the first priest (Ex. 29:7), and again when Saul was anointed as the first King of Israel (I Sam. 10:1). Jacob's reaction to his dream seems to imply that he fully grasped the significance of the distance which had arisen between man and God. He sees that not all of his descendants will have the courage to face this gap and that eventually Israel will acquire both a Priest and a King. When Jacob returns to the place of his dream in chapter Thirty-five the fact that Israel will one day be in need of a king will be explicitly stated. The Prophets, the priests, and the kings—these are the people Jacob had in mind in the previous verse when he spoke of *The gate of Heaven*.

19. AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE BETH-EL: BUT THE NAME OF THAT CITY WAS CALLED LUZ AT THE FIRST.

The tension is now broken. *The place* turns out to be Beth-el. The difficulty is to account for the great importance of that place for the author. Abraham had once made a sacrifice there and had even lived there for a time, but he built many altars and lived in many places. Joshua once captured the city, but the battle itself is not even mentioned. Deborah was there for a while, but it is hard to see in what sense that could be of such grave importance.

In order to answer our present difficulty, we shall be forced to face a problem directly which has been looming over our heads since Chapter Twelve but which we had thought to avoid. From the moment we noticed the connection between the cities in which Abraham built his altars and the scenes of Joshua's battles, it became clear that the Book of Genesis could not be understood without knowledge of the later books. The present author does not regard himself as

a philologist and cannot in all honesty raise the problem concerning the date of authorship. Nor is there any consensus among those wise men for him to accept. Partly for that reason and partly because of the traditional claim for its divine authorship through Moses it would not only be foolish to face the problem of the date of authorship but at best it could only distract us from our true goals. Nonetheless we shall be forced to face the problem in some form or another. If the author presupposes knowledge of later events we must determine which later events the author had in mind. Although we have limited our discussion to events mentioned in the Bible we must determine the author's date in order to exclude later events.

The difficulty is that the city of Beth-el rises to prominence only in the Book of Kings. Thus we are forced to consider that book and to decide at what point in the Book of Kings there is an occurrence at Beth-el which would justify its great importance at this point in the Book of Genesis.

The Book of Kings begins with the reign of Solomon. These introductory passages give the immediate cause for the division of the country into north and south. The final chapters of the last book describe the destruction of the state. The large central section is held together by the story of the *man of God* and the *old prophet*, which was retold in the Digression following Chapter Twenty. Jeroboam's altar is used as the symbol of the disunity which existed in Israel during most of its life. It was the focus of both halves of the story concerning the *man of God*, and it formed a thread holding them together. No less than nineteen times throughout both Books of Kings there is a reference to the *sin of Jeroboam*. Even concerning the greatest of the kings the ends of their lives are always summed up by the words *He departed not from the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nabat, who made Israel to sin*.

Only in her last days, not long before the Babylonians attacked, was Josiah able to reunify the country and destroy the symbol of its disunity, the altar at Beth-el.

If this is the moment which the author has in mind we shall be forced to rethink in a most radical sense much of what has been said. The distant fears that we imagined the author to have had concerning the rise of Babylon in Gen. 14.3 could not have been as distant as we had supposed. That in itself is of no consequence. The grave problem is to understand how the world could be blessed through Israel if Israel had already fallen. At this point the evidence looks pretty slim, but nevertheless it does open up a possibility which we shall have to bear in mind from now on.

If we are to read the *Promise* in the light of the probability that the state is soon to fall or had already fallen into the hands of Babylon we must reinterpret the whole of the author's intent. The success of the New Way must rest in its ability to withstand the years spent in captivity under foreign domination in Babylon. If this was the immediate cause, as opposed to the ultimate cause of the book, it would certainly shed light on the story of Joseph and the time

spent in Egypt, as well as the great insistence that we have seen throughout the book on the number forty and its relation to gestation.

The Book of Genesis was intended as a book for all times, but if there was another sense in which it was intended for those who lived after the time of Josiah then the period spent in Egypt and the redemption under the leadership of Moses may have been intended as a paradigm for those who were about to go into Babylon.

20. AND JACOB VOWED A VOW, SAYING, IF GOD WILL BE WITH ME, AND
WILL KEEP ME IN THIS WAY THAT I GO, AND WILL GIVE ME BREAD TO EAT,
AND RAIMENT TO PUT ON,
21. SO THAT I COME AGAIN TO MY FATHER'S HOUSE IN PEACE; THEN SHALL
THE LORD BE MY GOD.

Unfortunately there have been times when these two verses have been radically misunderstood. They have been taken to imply that Jacob proposed a deal according to which he would serve the Lord for material gain. As we shall see in the following paragraph, however, Jacob solemnly pledges himself to live in a certain way.

Within the context of the chapter as a whole Jacob has just discovered that his life will be very different from the life of his father. He was off to Haran, and on the way had a dream in which he learned that his relationship to God would no longer be precisely the same as the relationship between God and his fathers. God will be more distant. Jacob's "conditions" turn out to be very little indeed. He seems to be saying that so long as he has clothing and bread, no more than the meanest man requires for simple survival, and that if he is in any way enabled to return to the Promised Land, then his oath is to continue the New Way of his fathers.

22. AND THIS STONE, WHICH I HAVE SET FOR A PILLAR, SHALL BE GOD'S
HOUSE: AND OF ALL THAT THOU SHALT GIVE ME I WILL SURELY GIVE THE
TENTH UNTO THEE.

Jacob's oath includes his willingness to accept the duty of being tithed. This section of his oath is a reference back to Verse Eighteen, where he first realized the magnitude of the change which would be necessary within the constitution of the people, given the new relationship between man and God. If God is no longer to speak personally and in the most literal sense with each of his descendants then both a political and an ecclesiastical order would become necessary.

In the commentary to Gen. 15:19 we described the necessity for an ecclesiastical hierarchy in terms of the need to fill up the gap between man and God by a priestly class. Tithes are generally understood to be the return which the Children of Israel give to the Levites as recompense for their labors in the Tab-

ernacle. The Levites themselves were to have had no land given them but to subsist solely on these tithes. Presumably, by making the Levites dependent upon the people in this way, the Lord thought to avoid corruption within the Levite class.

Tithing is usually connected with the yearly sacrifice and more particularly with the joys surrounding the communal meal when all of Israel is to renew its feeling of unity and comradeship. It is also interesting to note that according to law the fruits which are taken for tithes are not to be inspected. They are to be taken at random from the harvest as a whole so that the Levite, too, will receive the same mixture of good and bad crops that are enjoyed by the other men (Lev. 27:33). In this sense the tithes were to be no more than just recompense for what they would have gained had they worked along with their brothers.

In expressing his willingness to give tithes, Jacob is in fact expressing for himself and his children the willingness to accept the burden which such an ecclesiastical hierarchy would entail.

Jacob's oath then consists of two parts; one which touches only himself, the other, part of the New Way which he is helping to build for his descendants. For himself he swears to take on this long journey in good spirits, even though he shall be forced to fend for himself in a strange land, and to do his best to return to the home of his fathers.

But, by anointing the stone with oil and pledging the tithes, he tacitly accepts these necessary burdens which a more sedentary and political way of life will impose upon his descendants.

CHAPTER XXIX

I. THEN JACOB WENT ON HIS JOURNEY, AND CAME INTO THE LAND OF THE PEOPLE OF THE EAST.

The Hebrew literally reads *Jacob picked up his feet and went*. In modern English we would probably say *Jacob picked up his heels* since there is the implication of that same jauntiness of character which the English expresses. Young Jacob is off to *the land of the people of the east*. This land is intended to conjure up many and various images in our mind. It was the home of Cain and his breed as well as the site of the Tower of Babel. It was the direction in which Lot chose to go when he left Abraham to live in Sodom, and it was also the home of Abraham's sons that he had with his wife Keturah. Finally the men of that place will join the forces of Balak in their attack against Israel (Num. 23:7). Its specific geographic location may not be as important as its ambiguous character. It is at the same time both a wild place and a place close to Eden.

2. AND HE LOOKED, AND BEHOLD A WELL IN THE FIELD, AND, LO, THERE WERE THREE FLOCKS OF SHEEP LYING BY IT; FOR OUT OF THAT WELL THEY

- WATERED THE FLOCKS: AND A GREAT STONE WAS UPON THE WELL'S MOUTH.
3. AND THITHER WERE ALL THE FLOCKS GATHERED: AND THEY ROLLED THE STONE FROM THE WELL'S MOUTH, AND WATERED THE SHEEP, AND PUT THE STONE AGAIN UPON THE WELL'S MOUTH IN ITS PLACE.

Jacob's experiences begin much as those of Abraham's servant in Chapter Twenty-four. He came to the well and found a number of shepherds with their flocks gathered around it, but this time there is a great stone covering its mouth. In Verse Three we are told that it has become the custom of the men in that city to gather in order to roll the stone from the well's mouth and feed their flocks together. However we are not told whether this arrangement was made in order to protect their water from foreigners or because of disagreement among themselves concerning water rights.

4. AND JACOB SAID UNTO THEM, MY BRETHREN, WHENCE BE YE? AND THEY SAID, OF HARAN ARE WE.
5. AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, KNOW YE LABAN THE SON OF NAHOR? AND THEY SAID, WE KNOW HIM.
6. AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, IS HE WELL? AND THEY SAID, HE IS WELL: AND, BEHOLD, RACHEL HIS DAUGHTER COMETH WITH THE SHEEP.

At this point in the text we can see the great difference between the present chapter and Chapter Twenty-four. Abraham's servant, trusting to the angel, gave Rebekah bracelets and earrings even before he knew who she was. Jacob, on the other hand, makes definite inquiry about his family and their status before meeting them. But more importantly he searches them out.

With the exception of their last reply, the shepherds answer Jacob in simple, one word statements. Their lack of friendliness would seem to reinforce the notion that their arrangement concerning the heavy stone was intended to keep internal peace as well as to protect them from the outside.

7. AND HE SAID, LO, IT IS YET HIGH DAY, NEITHER IS IT TIME THAT THE CATTLE SHOULD BE GATHERED TOGETHER; WATER YE THE SHEEP, AND GO AND FEED THEM.

Jacob tries to arrange the most favorable circumstances for his meeting the young lady by making sure that the other shepherds are well out of the way. Under the circumstances Don Juan himself could hardly have thought of a better plan.

8. AND THEY SAID, WE CANNOT, UNTIL ALL THE FLOCKS BE GATHERED TOGETHER, AND TILL THEY ROLL THE STONE FROM THE WELL'S MOUTH; THEN WE WATER THE SHEEP.
9. AND WHILE HE YET SPAKE WITH THEM, RACHEL CAME WITH HER FATHER'S SHEEP: FOR SHE KEPT THEM.

Unfortunately the young lover's plan has failed. The lady has arrived, and the men are not yet out of the way. There seems to be some law which prevents the shepherds from going about their business and which will force Jacob to take another tack.

10. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN JACOB SAW RACHEL THE DAUGHTER OF LABAN HIS MOTHER'S BROTHER, AND THE SHEEP OF LABAN HIS MOTHER'S BROTHER, THAT JACOB WENT NEAR, AND ROLLED THE STONE FROM THE WELL'S MOUTH, AND WATERED THE FLOCK OF LABAN HIS MOTHER'S BROTHER.

Jacob's new plan is even more splendid than the last. He will win the young lady by rolling away the stone himself in spite of the shepherds who are standing by. His gallantry does not care about the laws, and his heroic inclinations provide him with the necessary strength.

11. AND JACOB KISSED RACHEL, AND LIFTED UP HIS VOICE, AND WEPT.

12. AND JACOB TOLD RACHEL THAT HE WAS HER FATHER'S BROTHER, AND THAT HE WAS REBEKAH'S SON: AND SHE RAN AND TOLD HER FATHER.

Jacob was moved by what will turn out to be the highest passion in the Book of Genesis, the tears of happiness (see commentary to Gen. 45:1).

Jacob wasted no time in long introductions after his duties were finished. Verse Eleven is the clear proof of his heroic character. Poor Rachel doesn't even know who this gallant young man is, but perhaps she, too, has a taste for the romantic. Jacob however is not a simple romantic. In Verse Ten he clearly looked both at the young lady and at the size of the flock. The combination of beauty and wealth is emphasized by a certain play on words. The word for *kiss* as used in Verse Eleven is almost identical to the word which has been translated *watered* in Verse Ten.

After the meeting Rachel *runs* home to tell her father what has happened. Whether her running proves that she has the virtues of Abraham and Rebekah or whether it is to be understood in another way we shall only be able to tell when we get to know her better (see commentary to Gen. 24:15).

13. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN LABAN HEARD THE TIDINGS OF JACOB HIS SISTER'S SON THAT HE RAN TO MEET HIM, AND EMBRACED HIM, AND KISSED HIM, AND BROUGHT HIM TO HIS HOUSE. AND HE TOLD LABAN ALL THESE THINGS.

14a. AND LABAN SAID TO HIM, SURELY THOU ART MY BONE AND MY FLESH.

Laban too seems to greet Jacob in a friendly manner. His friendliness is normally taken to be a mere show, but as we shall see in the following chapters, his character is by no means simple. There are many facets to be considered in forming a judgment of his character.

14b. AND HE ABODE WITH HIM THE SPACE OF A MONTH.

Jacob has already stayed in Haran a full month, a good deal longer than the time his mother had appointed. Several factors may have played a role in Jacob's decision to extend the visit. He may have lacked the trust which his mother had in the fundamental decency of his brother, Esau, and then too, there was the young lady in Padan-aram.

15. AND LABAN SAID UNTO JACOB, BECAUSE THOU ART MY BROTHER,
SHOULDEST THOU THEREFORE SERVE ME FOR NOUGHT? TELL ME, WHAT SHALL
THY WAGES BE?

16. AND LABAN HAD TWO DAUGHTERS: THE NAME OF THE ELDER WAS LEAH,
AND THE NAME OF THE YOUNGER WAS RACHEL.

17. LEAH WAS TENDER EYED: BUT RACHEL WAS BEAUTIFUL AND WELL FA-
VOURED.

18. AND JACOB LOVED RACHEL; AND SAID, I WILL SERVE THEE SEVEN YEARS
FOR RACHEL THY YOUNGER DAUGHTER.

19. AND LABAN SAID, IT IS BETTER THAT I GIVE HER TO THEE, THAN THAT
I SHOULD GIVE HER TO ANOTHER MAN: ABIDE WITH ME.

20. AND JACOB SERVED SEVEN YEARS FOR RACHEL; AND THEY SEEMED UNTO
HIM BUT A FEW DAYS, FOR THE LOVE HE HAD TO HER.

Laban, for one reason or another, seems to be pleased with Jacob and desires him to stay for an extended period of time. His offer to allow Jacob to set the wages can be understood in several ways—either as a friendly gesture or as a calculation based on the assumption that, given Jacob's character, he would offer more than Laban in all decency could have demanded. At this point Laban's character remains obscure.

Jacob wishes to contract for the younger daughter, Rachel, whom he deeply loves. She is very beautiful and the younger daughter of a wealthy man. During those seven years we see the same gentility and joviality which became apparent in Verse Ten.

Regardless of his long-range thoughts Jacob is somewhat of a romantic. While he knows from his dream that one day he will settle down to take laws and customs more seriously, he has decided to play the madcap in his youth and might well be called a Biblical version of Prince Hal. While he does not seem to share the more complete view of beauty held by the author of the Book of Genesis, one might justifiably wonder whether that author himself might not have been more attracted by the softness of Leah's eyes than by Rachel's beauty. Needless to say Jacob thinks nothing of asking for the hand of the younger daughter even though her older sister is not yet married. One cannot forget that he himself had an older brother who never received his birthright. Then, too, when he rolled the great stone from the mouth of the well he tacitly

assumed that the distinction between right and wrong was more a matter of good spirits than of law.

21. AND JACOB SAID UNTO LABAN, GIVE ME MY WIFE, FOR MY DAYS ARE FULFILLED, THAT I MAY GO IN UNTO HER.

Verse Twenty-one is difficult to interpret. There are two possibilities. It may be argued that Jacob's demands indicate that Laban had been remiss and allowed the time of service to drag on. However, given Jacob's actions in Verse Eleven it seems more likely that Verse Twenty-one takes place precisely seven years later to the day. During the seven years, Jacob seemed light-hearted enough, as is clear from Verse Twenty, but the moment had arrived and moments are of great importance to men with such souls.

22. AND LABAN GATHERED TOGETHER ALL THE MEN OF THE PLACE, AND MADE A FEAST.

23. AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE EVENING THAT HE TOOK LEAH HIS DAUGHTER, AND BROUGHT HER TO HIM; AND HE WENT IN UNTO HER.

Jacob's error becomes somewhat more intelligible when one remembers that the word for *feast* quite literally means to *provide liquid* and may imply that he was not fully capable of making distinctions at the time. Laban's actions, while they may not be considered noble, may not be fully reprehensible. He may have entered into the original agreement on the assumption that his elder daughter, Leah, would have found herself an appropriate mate during the seven years of service, though he does seem to have taken a coward's way out.

24. AND LABAN GAVE UNTO HIS DAUGHTER LEAH ZILPAH HIS MAID FOR AN HANDMAID.

25. AND IT CAME TO PASS, THAT IN THE MORNING, BEHOLD IT WAS LEAH: AND HE SAID TO LABAN, WHAT IS THIS THOU HAST DONE UNTO ME? DID NOT I SERVE WITH THEE FOR RACHEL? WHEREFORE THEN HAST THOU BEGUILLED ME?

26. AND LABAN SAID, IT MUST NOT BE SO DONE IN OUR COUNTRY TO GIVE THE YOUNGER BEFORE THE FIRSTBORN.

While Jacob's anger is certainly intelligible, Laban, aside from his deceit, appears to have acted in a generous way. His greeting in Verse Thirteen as well as his gifts in Verses Twenty-four and Twenty-nine leave little to be desired, and his deceit in Verse Twenty-three is no more than the inverse of Jacob's own actions in the preceding chapter. In fact according to the law Laban's deceit appears to be somewhat less onerous.

27. FULFILL HER WEEK, AND WE WILL GIVE THEE THIS ALSO FOR THE SERVICE WHICH THOU SHALT SERVE WITH ME YET SEVEN OTHER YEARS.

28. AND JACOB DID SO, AND FULFILLED HER WEEK: AND HE GAVE HIM RACHEL HIS DAUGHTER TO WIFE ALSO.
29. AND LABAN GAVE TO RACHEL HIS DAUGHTER, BILHAH HIS HANDMAID TO BE HER MAID.
30. AND HE WENT IN ALSO UNTO RACHEL, AND HE LOVED ALSO RACHEL MORE THAN LEAH, AND SERVED WITH HIM YET SEVEN OTHER YEARS.
31. AND WHEN THE LORD SAW THAT LEAH WAS HATED, HE OPENED HER WOMB: BUT RACHEL WAS BARREN.

God's preference for Leah will be manifested in the fact that she will be buried with Jacob in Machpelah though Rachel will be buried by herself near Bethlehem.

32. AND LEAH CONCEIVED, AND BARE A SON, AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME REUBEN: FOR SHE SAID, SURELY THE LORD HATH LOOKED UPON MY AFFLICTION; NOW THEREFORE MY HUSBAND WILL LOVE ME.
33. AND SHE CONCEIVED AGAIN, AND BARE A SON; AND SAID, BECAUSE THE LORD HATH HEARD THAT I WAS HATED, HE HATH THEREFORE GIVEN ME THIS SON ALSO: AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME SIMEON.
34. AND SHE CONCEIVED AGAIN, AND BARE A SON; AND SAID, NOW THIS TIME WILL MY HUSBAND BE JOINED UNTO ME BECAUSE I HAVE BORN HIM THREE SONS: THEREFORE WAS HIS NAME CALLED LEVI.
35. AND SHE CONCEIVED AGAIN, AND BARE A SON: AND SHE SAID, NOW WILL I PRAISE THE LORD: THEREFORE SHE CALLED HIS NAME JUDAH; AND LEFT BEARING.

The commentary on these passages as well as most of the following chapter will be brief. A fuller account of the sons and their descendants according to their tribes will be found in the commentary to Chapter Forty-nine.

The point which will interest us most is the names themselves, but since they reflect more on the character of the mother who gave the name rather than on the child himself, we shall discuss the names in the next chapter where we will see more of Jacob's wives.

CHAPTER XXX

1. AND WHEN RACHEL SAW THAT SHE BARE JACOB NO CHILDREN, RACHEL ENVIED HER SISTER; AND SAID UNTO JACOB, GIVE ME CHILDREN, OR ELSE I DIE.
2. AND JACOB'S ANGER WAS KINDLED AGAINST RACHEL: AND HE SAID, AM I IN GOD'S STEAD, WHO HATH WITHHELD FROM THEE THE FRUIT OF THE WOMB?

In spite of having her husband's love, Rachel feels jealousy and even hatred towards her sister, Leah. The end of Chapter Twenty-nine made it obvious that

Leah's patience has not won her the love of her husband, and yet Rachel was envious. But we shall see more of that as the chapter continues.

The words which are translated *am I in God's stead* literally read *Am I under God*. The Hebrew word for *Under* allows for two possible interpretations. It often means *to replace* or *to stand in the place of*, but it can also mean *under* in the political sense of being under a ruler. It is not unlikely that both interpretations are intended. Ever since the dream at Beth-el, Jacob has been left to his own devices, and he will remain in that situation for some time.

In either case there is something ironical about Jacob's sharp answer because the words used to express his anger are often used as a description of God. In Verse Two the text uses the wonderful metaphor *his nose burnt*, which might better be translated *he was fuming* than *his anger was kindled*. The other irony about the passage will emerge at the end of the chapter where Jacob, at least in the case of sheep, goats and rams, proves to be quite capable of ensuring conception.

3. AND SHE SAID, BEHOLD MY MAID BILHAH, GO IN UNTO HER; AND SHE SHALL BEAR UPON MY KNEES, THAT I MAY ALSO HAVE CHILDREN BY HER.
4. AND SHE GAVE HIM BILHAH HER HANDMAID TO WIFE: AND JACOB WENT IN UNTO HER.
5. AND BILHAH CONCEIVED, AND BARE JACOB A SON.
6. AND RACHEL SAID, GOD HATH JUDGED ME, AND HATH ALSO HEARD MY VOICE, AND HATH GIVEN ME A SON: THEREFORE CALLED SHE HIS NAME DAN.
7. AND BILHAH RACHEL'S MAID CONCEIVED AGAIN, AND BARE JACOB A SECOND SON.
8. AND RACHEL SAID, WITH GREAT WRESTLINGS HAVE I WRESTLED WITH MY SISTER, AND I HAVE PREVAILED: AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME NAPHTALI.
9. WHEN LEAH SAW THAT SHE HAD LEFT BEARING, SHE TOOK ZILPAH HER MAID, AND GAVE HER JACOB TO WIFE.

Leah, who has been living with a man who hates her for some time, always sees the birth of a son as opening up the possibility that one day her husband will care for her. The name she gave her first son, Reuben, means, *See (I have given you) a son*. The second son was named Simeon. Apparently in reference to God she has named him *there is one who hears*. Her third son she named Levi from the verb which is translated in the text *be joined*. Her fourth son she named Judah, which the author derived from the words *I shall praise the Lord*.

Rachel is a different woman. She sees the birth of her children as a personal victory over her older sister. She names them Dan, meaning *judgment*, and Naphtali, coming from the word *to wrestle*. Rachel's jealousy renders her incapable of sharing the joys which her sister felt in spite of her loneliness.

10. AND ZILPAH LEAH'S MAID BARE JACOB A SON.
11. AND LEAH SAID, A TROOP COMETH: AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME GAD.
12. AND ZILPAH LEAH'S MAID BARE JACOB A SECOND SON.
13. AND LEAH SAID, HAPPY AM I, FOR THE DAUGHTERS WILL CALL ME BLESSED:
AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME ASHER.

Leah seems to be as pleased with Zilpah's sons as she was with her own. She names them Gad—a *troop*, and Asher, which means *blessed*.

14. AND REUBEN WENT IN THE DAYS OF WHEAT HARVEST, AND FOUND MANDRAKES IN THE FIELD, AND BROUGHT THEM UNTO HIS MOTHER LEAH. THEN RACHEL SAID TO LEAH, GIVE ME, I PRAY THEE, OF THY SON'S MANDRAKES.
15. AND SHE SAID UNTO HER, IS IT A SMALL MATTER THAT THOU HAST TAKEN MY HUSBAND? AND WOULDST THOU TAKE AWAY MY SON'S MANDRAKES ALSO? AND RACHEL SAID, THEREFORE HE SHALL LIE WITH THEE TO NIGHT FOR THY SON'S MANDRAKES.
16. AND JACOB CAME OUT OF THE FIELD IN THE EVENING AND LEAH WENT OUT TO MEET HIM, AND SAID, THOU MUST COME IN UNTO ME; FOR SURELY I HAVE HIRED THEE WITH MY SON'S MANDRAKES. AND HE LAY WITH HER THAT NIGHT.

Words and their usages will play a very significant role in the present chapter. The first of these rare words is *mandrake*. It comes from a word meaning *beloved* and in that sense is similar to the English word *loveapple*. Although the root can also mean *uncle*, and is used twice in that sense in I Samuel, the word as related to love will never appear in any of the books from Genesis through the Books of Kings.

Leah's son, Reuben, has presented her with a magical fruit with a magical sounding name. Its magical powers of ensuring conception seem to be precisely those powers which Jacob denied having in Verse Two. Leah's love for her husband seems to outweigh her desire for the *mandrake* even though she, too, had ceased to bear children (Gen. 30:9).

17. AND GOD HEARKENED UNTO LEAH, AND SHE CONCEIVED, AND BARE JACOB THE FIFTH SON.
18. AND LEAH SAID, GOD HATH GIVEN ME MY HIRE, BECAUSE I HAVE GIVEN MY MAIDEN TO MY HUSBAND: AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME ISSACHAR.
19. AND LEAH CONCEIVED AGAIN, AND BARE JACOB THE SIXTH SON.
20. AND LEAH SAID, GOD HATH ENDUED ME WITH A GOOD DOWRY; NOW WILL MY HUSBAND DWELL WITH ME, BECAUSE I HAVE BORN HIM SIX SONS; AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME ZEBULUN.
21. AND AFTERWARDS SHE BARE A DAUGHTER, AND CALLED HER NAME DINAH.

The mandrake appears to have been useless. Leah bears three more children—two sons and a daughter—and Rachel still has nothing. The name of the fifth son is a kind of portmanteau made from the words *man* and *hire*. The name of the sixth son is derived from the word which is translated *he shall dwell with me*. Her daughter's name, Dinah, appears to have the same root as Rachel's first son, Dan, but Leah does not seem to make much of a fuss over the name.

22. AND GOD REMEMBERED RACHEL AND GOD HEARKENED TO HER AND OPENED HER WOMB.
 23. AND SHE CONCEIVED, AND BARE A SON; AND SAID, GOD HATH TAKEN AWAY MY REPROACH.
 24. AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME JOSEPH; AND SAID, THE LORD SHALL ADD TO ME ANOTHER SON.

Rachel finally has a son of her own. She gave him the name Joseph, meaning *he shall add*. Poor Rachel still sees the birth of her son as part of the battle with her sister, and rather than rejoice in the simple fact of birth she makes it clear that this victory is still insufficient and longs for another son. In Chapter Thirty-five she will finally be given that son but only at the cost of her own life.

25. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN RACHEL HAD BORN JOSEPH, THAT JACOB SAID UNTO LABAN, SEND ME AWAY, THAT I MAY GO UNTO MY OWN PLACE, AND TO MY COUNTRY.
 26. GIVE ME MY WIVES AND MY CHILDREN, FOR WHOM I HAVE SERVED THEE, AND LET ME GO: FOR THOU KNOWEST MY SERVICE WHICH I HAVE DONE THEE.
 27. AND LABAN SAID UNTO HIM, I PRAY THEE, IF I HAVE FOUND FAVOR IN THINE EYES, TARRY: FOR I HAVE LEARNED BY DIVINATION THAT THE LORD HATH BLEST ME FOR THY SAKE.
 28. AND HE SAID, APPOINT ME THY WAGES, AND I WILL GIVE IT.
 29. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, THOU KNOWEST HOW I HAVE SERVED THEE, AND HOW THY CATTLE WAS WITH ME.
 30. FOR IT WAS LITTLE WHICH THOU HADST BEFORE I CAME, AND IT IS NOW INCREASED UNTO A MULTITUDE; AND THE LORD HATH BLESSED THEE SINCE MY COMING: AND NOW WHEN SHALL I PROVIDE FOR MINE OWN HOUSE ALSO?

The discussion between Jacob and Laban is somewhat formal. The long form of the first person which is used in polite speech often occurs, as does the particle which can be roughly translated *please*. Laban has discovered that his household prospered while Jacob was with him and wishes Jacob to remain. Jacob on the other hand knows that it is time for him to return in order to build his own house. Laban's prosperity appears to be a scrambled form of the ultimate blessing of the book, *through you all mankind will be blessed*, but the

time for such a blessing has obviously not yet arrived, and Jacob sees that he must start in a small way.

In Verse Twenty-seven part of the reason for the lack of clarity in Laban's character becomes clear. He is a magician and has learned about God's special love for Jacob through the magical art of *divination*.

The root of the word for *divination*, *Nachash*, is related to other words which shall play an important role for us. One of the words was used in the story of the Garden of Eden where it appears as the word which means *serpent*, and the other word is the Hebrew word for *brass*. Later on in the text, while in Egypt, Joseph will present himself as a *diviner*, and we shall see more of the problem at that time.

Moses' first act of magic in Egypt, the great land of the magicians, was to turn his staff into a *serpent* (Ex. 4:3 and 7:9-12). While in Egypt Moses and Aaron both demonstrated great magical abilities which could outdo all the magic of Egypt even though the practice of magic was strictly forbidden once the Jews were safely out of the hands of Pharaoh (Lev. 19:26).

We shall soon meet Pharaoh's magicians (Gen. 41:8, 20, 24), and they will appear again in the Book of Exodus. In each case they are true magicians who are able to do most wonderful things. The author of the Bible does not deny that there are men who can accomplish by their knowledge deeds which go well beyond the normal course of events, but in no case do such men prosper.

The charms of such men and the need that others have to hold them in veneration is well understood by the Bible. The laws which prohibit magic in Israel are given in the Book of Deuteronomy. However, they are immediately followed by God's promise to send a prophet to replace Moses, as if the natural desire to venerate the magician is one of the human needs which is better satisfied by a prophet.

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered thee so to do. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken: (Deut. 18:10-15)

Moses may have hoped to put down his magical rod for the last time when he crossed the Sea of Reeds, but things were not to be so. The Children of Israel made their first attempt to enter the land from the southeast. By now we know that that campaign failed because the men could not yet face the giants. After that campaign there were a series of revolutions under Aaron and Miriam and then under Korah and his allies. After the first revolt, at the time of the

giants, the people, in remorse and shame, tried to conquer the land. But, as Moses had warned them, it was too late, and they failed at the battle of Hormah (Num. 14:44).

The string of revolutions that took place following the battle of Hormah led to the death of Aaron in a manner which we shall describe in the commentary to Gen. 49:5. It was at that time that Israel first came into contact with the Canaanites who inhabited the Promised Land. King Arad attacked Israel in the second battle of Hormah, in which Israel was victorious. But that victory was also the swan song of the southern campaign. Moses, realizing that the people were still not yet able to face the giants, led them up to the River Arnon to begin the northern campaign, which led to the wars against the Ammonites and the story of Balaam.

When Moses decided to give up the southern campaign the people revolted, and God punished them by sending fiery *serpents*. As antidote for the plague Moses was told to make a fiery *serpent* out of *brass* and to hoist it up on a pole. Those who had been bitten by one of the Lord's serpents could be cured by looking up at the *serpent* of *brass*. And so Moses was forced to pick up the serpent that he had thought to leave in the land of Egypt.

This story reflects God's way of curing Israel which we have seen from time to time. It is a substitution of the artful for the harmful. The medicine itself unfortunately, but necessarily, was kindred to the disease. The fiery serpent of brass was never mentioned again until the Second Book of Kings, where we are told that the Children of Israel kept it, giving it the name *Nechustan* from the root *nachash*. For all these hundreds of years they burned incense to it until it was finally destroyed by King Hezekiah (II Kings 18:4).

In general, magic is not part of the New Way. However, as we have seen, there are times when the leaders of the New Way, such as Moses, Aaron, and in the present case, Jacob, find themselves in foreign lands and in the hands of magicians. In such cases these men prove able to match the foreign magicians.

31. AND HE SAID, WHAT SHALL I GIVE THEE: AND JACOB SAID, THOU SHALT NOT GIVE ME ANYTHING: IF THOU WILT DO THIS THING FOR ME. I WILL AGAIN FEED AND KEEP THY FLOCK.
32. I WILL PASS THROUGH ALL THY FLOCK TO DAY REMOVING FROM THENCE ALL THE SPECKLED AND SPOTTED CATTLE AND ALL THE BROWN CATTLE AMONG THE SHEEP, AND THE SPOTTED AND SPECKLED AMONG THE GOATS: AND OF SUCH SHALL BE MY HIRE.
33. SO SHALL MY RIGHTEOUSNESS ANSWER FOR ME IN TIME TO COME, WHEN IT SHALL COME FOR MY HIRE BEFORE THY FACE: EVERY ONE THAT IS NOT SPECKLED AND SPOTTED AMONG THE GOATS, AND BROWN AMONG THE SHEEP, THAT SHALL BE COUNTED STOLEN WITH ME.
34. AND LABAN SAID, BEHOLD, I WOULD IT MIGHT BE ACCORDING TO THY WORD.

35. AND HE REMOVED THAT DAY THE HE-GOATS THAT WERE RINGSTRAKED AND SPOTTED, AND ALL THE SHE-GOATS THAT WERE SPECKLED AND SPOTTED AND EVERY ONE THAT HAD SOME WHITE ON IT, AND ALL THE BROWN AMONG THE SHEEP, AND GAVE THEM INTO THE HAND OF HIS SONS.
36. AND HE SET THREE DAYS JOURNEY BETWIXT HIMSELF AND JACOB: AND JACOB FED THE REST OF LABAN'S FLOCKS.
37. AND JACOB TOOK HIM RODS OF GREEN POPLAR, AND OF THE HAZEL AND CHESNUT TREE: AND PILLED WHITE STRAKES IN THEM, AND MADE THE WHITE APPEAR WHICH WAS IN THE RODS.
38. AND HE SET THE RODS WHICH HE HAD PILLED BEFORE THE FLOCKS IN THE GUTTERS IN THE WATERING TROUGHS WHEN THE FLOCKS CAME TO DRINK, THAT THEY SHOULD CONCEIVE WHEN THEY CAME TO DRINK.
39. AND THE FLOCKS CONCEIVED BEFORE THE RODS, AND BROUGHT FORTH CATTLE RINGSTRAKED, SPECKLED AND SPOTTED.

In Verse Thirty-One Jacob insists that he desires no pay for his service. The only thing he requires is the temporary use of Laban's cattle in order to produce his own herd. By outdoing Laban's magic Jacob will both prove his independence from Laban and be in a better position to meet his brother, Esau. In the meantime he promises to do all of this while not shirking his duty towards his host.

The precise terms of the agreement are not at all clear. It appears as though Jacob agrees to accept only strange looking cattle, which are rarely born, since most cattle are either black or white and have straight hair. One gathers from Verses Thirty-three and Thirty-four that the arrangement was only to affect cattle to be born in the future and that all such cattle presently in Laban's flock will remain the property of Laban. In Verse Thirty-two Jacob makes the prospect of his amassing any flock at all even dimmer by taking the off-breed cattle out of the flock in the beginning, which will mean that the brown and speckled sheep will have to come from the pure line of white sheep, contrary to the natural order of birth.

The passages which describe how Jacob was able to accomplish his task are some of the strangest in the Torah. The Book of Genesis is written in very simple language. Seldom does one find a word which would not be at home over the average dining-room table, and yet suddenly in Chapter Thirty, Verses Thirty-two to Forty-two, and Chapter Thirty-one, Verses Eight to Twelve we shall meet a wholly new vocabulary connected with a very strange activity.

By this time the reader is aware that our commentary has been trying to establish a unity in the Bible from Genesis through Kings. These twelve books taken together are what I pompously mean by the word *dodecateuch*.

The word for *speckled*, for instance, appears seven times in the relevant passages but will appear only once more in the Bible as a whole and never again in the dodecateuch (Song 1:11). The following chart presents a list of those

words which are completely foreign in the sense that the Hebrew language contains no other word coming from the same root. The second column will give the number of times it appears in the present passage; the third column will give any reference within the dodecateuch; and the fourth column will give a complete list of references to Biblical books not included within the dodecateuch:

<i>Word</i>	<i>Chaps. 30-31</i>	<i>Dodecateuch</i>	<i>Other Books</i>
SPECKLED	7	—	Song of Songs 1:11
SPOTTED	5	Josh. 9:5	Ezekiel 16:16
BROWN	4	—	—
HE-GOAT	1	Gen. 32:15	Proverbs 30:31 Chron. 17:11
POPLAR	1	—	Hosea 4:13
HAZEL	1	—	—
PILL	3	—	—
GUTTER	2	Ex. 2:16	Song of Songs 7:6
CONCEIVE	3	—	Psalms 51:7
GRIZZLE	2	—	Zachariah 6:3 Zachariah 6:6
RINGSTRAKED*	6	—	—
STRAKES*	1	—	—
STRONGER*	1	—	—
WATERING-TROUGH*	1	Gen. 24:20	—

*The roots of these four words are morphologically identical to roots commonly found in the Bible, but in each case the meaning is so vastly different that there is probably no etymological connection.

The total number of appearances is as follows:

<i>Number of words</i>	<i>Number of appearances in present passage</i>	<i>Number of appearances in the Dodecateuch</i>	<i>Number of appearances in rest of Bible</i>
15	39	4	10

The language of the passage is intended to reflect its magical character and reminds us of the fact that when Jacob is not wholly within the land of the New Way he is sometimes forced to act in a manner appropriate to those other lands.

40. AND JACOB DID SEPARATE THE LAMBS, AND SET THE FACES OF THE FLOCKS TOWARDS THE RINGSTRAKES, AND ALL THE BROWN IN THE FLOCK OF LABAN; AND HE PUT HIS OWN FLOCKS BY THEMSELVES, AND PUT THEM NOT UNTO LABAN'S CATTLE.

41. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHENSOEVER THE STRONGER CATTLE DID CON-

CEIVE, THAT JACOB LAID THE RODS BEFORE THE EYES OF THE CATTLE IN THE GUTTERS, THAT THEY MIGHT CONCEIVE AMONG THE RODS.

42. BUT WHEN THE CATTLE WERE FEEBLE, HE PUT THEM NOT IN: SO THE FEEBLER WERE LABAN'S AND THE STRONGER JACOB'S.

Ironically enough Jacob, by the use of his magic staff, has been able to accomplish for the goats very nearly the same act he denied he could perform in the case of Rachel in the beginning of the chapter.

43. AND THE MAN INCREASED EXCEEDINGLY, AND HAD MUCH CATTLE, AND MAIDSERVANTS, AND MENSERVANTS, AND CAMELS, AND ASSES.

As Jacob is about to leave this land of wonders he appears to have sold his strange breed of cattle or to have exchanged them for a kind of property more befitting the New Way.