

interpretation

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The Lion and the Ass:

A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 31–34)

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CHAPTER XXXI

1. AND HE HEARD THE WORDS OF LABAN'S SONS, SAYING, JACOB HATH TAKEN AWAY ALL THAT WAS OUR FATHER'S AND OF THAT WHICH WAS OUR FATHER'S HATH HE GOTTEN ALL HIS GLORY.
2. AND JACOB BEHELD THE COUNTENANCE OF LABAN, AND, BEHOLD, IT WAS NOT TOWARD HIM AS BEFORE.
3. AND THE LORD SAID UNTO JACOB, RETURN UNTO THE LAND OF THY FATHERS AND TO THY KINDRED; AND I WILL BE WITH THEE.

God has spoken for the first time since Jacob's dream. His words remind us of the first time He spoke to Abraham. Back then He said *Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee*. Now He says *return unto the land of thy fathers and unto thy kindred and I will be with thee*. Superficially there doesn't seem to be much difference between the two, and God's voice to Jacob seems as crucial as the voice which came to Abraham. Within the context, however, they are quite different. Jacob had already decided to return home after Joseph was born, and the anger of Laban's sons must have made the urgency of the situation obvious to Jacob. In his commentary to Verse Three Professor Hartum claims that Jacob was confused and did not know what to do about the problems *until God told him to return*.¹ But given Jacob's character it hardly seems likely that he would have been at a loss. Under these conditions, God's statement would appear to be pointless since Jacob had already decided to return and the need for swift action was manifest. God, who has been silent since the dream, has spoken, but His words, so meaningful to Abraham, say nothing.

4. AND JACOB SENT AND CALLED RACHEL AND LEAH TO THE FIELD UNTO HIS FLOCK.
5. AND SAID UNTO THEM, I SEE YOUR FATHER'S COUNTENANCE, THAT IT IS NOT TOWARD ME AS BEFORE; BUT THE GOD OF MY FATHER HATH BEEN WITH ME.
6. AND YE KNOW THAT WITH ALL MY POWER I HAVE SERVED YOUR FATHER.

1. *The Bible with Commentary* by Prof. A. S. Hartum, Yavneh Publishing House, Tel Aviv, 1972, p. 115 (Hebrew).

7. AND YOUR FATHER HATH DECEIVED ME, AND CHANGED MY WAGES TEN TIMES; BUT GOD SUFFERED HIM NOT TO HURT ME.
8. IF HE SAID THUS, THE SPECKLED SHALL BE THY WAGES; THEN ALL THE CATTLE BARE SPECKLED: AND IF HE SAID THUS, THE RINGSTRAKED SHALL BE THY HIRE: THEN BARE ALL THE CATTLE RINGSTRAKED.

Jacob begins by calling his wives together. His plans to leave are made at a serious and formal family gathering. The fact that it is a planned occasion rather than a chance meeting gives it dramatic character. In this meeting Jacob announces his decision to his wives and reminds them of his constant labors for their father. But so far as we can tell Verse Seven is an exaggeration. Laban had indeed changed his wages in the case of his marriage, but as we have seen, Laban's actions on that occasion were not purely unjust. It has been argued that the difference between Verses Thirty-five and Thirty-two of Chapter Thirty indicate a second time in which Laban had changed Jacob's wages. However, since even a third account of the wages is given by Jacob himself in Verse Eight of the present chapter the author has again made it almost impossible for us to reach any firm conclusion about Laban's character.

9. THUS GOD HATH TAKEN AWAY THE CATTLE OF YOUR FATHER, AND GIVEN THEM TO ME
10. AND IT CAME TO PASS AT THE TIME THAT THE CATTLE CONCEIVED, THAT I LIFTED UP MINE EYES, AND SAW IN A DREAM, AND BEHOLD. THE RAMS WHICH LEAPED UPON THE CATTLE WERE RINGSTRAKED, SPECKLED, AND GRISLED.
11. AND THE ANGEL OF GOD SPAKE UNTO ME IN A DREAM, SAYING. JACOB: AND I SAID, HERE AM I.
12. AND HE SAID, LIFT UP NOW THINE EYES, AND SEE, ALL THE RAMS WHICH LEAP UPON THE CATTLE ARE RINGSTRAKED, SPECKLED, AND GRISLED; FOR I HAVE SEEN ALL THAT LABAN DOETH UNTO THEE.
13. I AM THE GOD OF BETH-EL, WHERE THOU ANOINTEDST THE PILLAR, AND WHERE THOU VOWEDST A VOW UNTO ME: NOW ARISE, GET THEE OUT FROM THIS LAND, AND RETURN UNTO THE LAND OF THY KINDRED.

In Verses Eleven and Twelve Jacob tells his wives that he learned about the cattle through a dream. The reader however has no direct knowledge of the dream but knows about it only from hearsay, which in the present case may not be good enough since Jacob has two serious problems at hand. He must persuade his wives to leave their father's house, and, as we shall see, Rachel was not as willing to do so as Rebekah had been. At the same time, Rachel, as far as we know, is still jealous of Leah in spite of the birth of Joseph, and Jacob must face his domestic problems as well.

In Verse Thirteen Jacob reminds his wives of the most serious reason for his return. He had vowed to return after the dream at Beth-el. The fact that

he mentions the dream immediately after his story about a second dream would in itself raise some doubts about the supposed second dream.

14. AND RACHEL AND LEAH ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, IS THERE YET ANY PORTION OR INHERITANCE FOR US IN OUR FATHER'S HOUSE?
15. ARE WE NOT COUNTED OF HIM STRANGERS? FOR HE HATH SOLD US, AND HATH QUITE DEVOURED ALSO OUR MONEY.
16. FOR ALL THE RICHES WHICH GOD HATH TAKEN FROM OUR FATHER, THAT IS OURS, AND OUR CHILDREN'S: NOW THEN, WHATSOEVER GOD HATH SAID UNTO THEE, DO.

Since Rachel's name is mentioned first, this may be an indication that she spoke and Leah agreed. It is unlikely that the Bible means that they spoke the same words at the same time as if in chorus. By raising the spectre of their father, Jacob has succeeded in presenting the situation in such a way that Rachel and Leah can agree. The wives are now more than willing to leave the country, and there is finally domestic peace. The complete success of Jacob's plan can be seen in Verse Sixteen when the words *our children* are used. Up to that point the distinction between *mine* and *thine* was fairly clear, at least to Rachel.

17. THEN JACOB ROSE UP, AND SET HIS SONS AND HIS WIVES UPON CAMELS;
18. AND HE CARRIED AWAY ALL HIS CATTLE, AND ALL HIS GOODS WHICH HE HAD GOTTEN, THE CATTLE OF HIS GETTING, WHICH HE HAD GOTTEN IN PADAN-ARAM, FOR TO GO TO ISAAC HIS FATHER IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.
19. AND LABAN WENT TO SHEAR HIS SHEEP: AND RACHEL HAD STOLEN THE IMAGES THAT WERE HER FATHER'S.

Rachel is unable to commit herself fully to the New Way. Her father's gods still hold a fascination for her. The reason for Jacob's exaggeration in Verse Seven now becomes clear. Jacob may have purposely exaggerated Laban's deceit in order to tempt Rachel into picking up the notion and expressing it with even greater fervor. If this was his plan he obviously met with great success in Verse Fifteen. Rachel has some doubts about the New Way and is still attracted by her father's gods. Without this ruse it is unlikely that Jacob would have succeeded in convincing Rachel that she should leave.

20. AND JACOB STOLE THE HEART OF LABAN THE SYRIAN, IN THAT HE TOLD HIM NOT THAT HE FLED.
21. SO HE FLED WITH ALL THAT HE HAD; AND HE ROSE UP AND PASSED OVER THE RIVER, AND SET HIS FACE TOWARD THE MOUNT GILEAD.
22. AND IT WAS TOLD LABAN ON THE THIRD DAY THAT JACOB WAS FLED.
23. AND HE TOOK HIS BRETHREN WITH HIM, AND PURSUED AFTER HIM SEVEN DAYS' JOURNEY; AND THEY OVERTOOK HIM IN THE MOUNT GILEAD.

The words *the heart of Laban* mean his daughters and his grandchildren, as will become obvious in Verse Twenty-six. The verse would seem to indicate that his children meant a great deal to Laban, but since his character is still obscure we cannot be sure what form that feeling took.

Jacob had a three-day head start during which time he crossed a river. These conditions certainly remind one of the flight from that other land of magic, Egypt, where the Jews again with a three-day head start crossed a great river (see Ex. 3:18 and 15:22).

24. AND GOD CAME TO LABAN THE SYRIAN IN A DREAM BY NIGHT, AND SAID UNTO HIM, TAKE HEED THAT THOU SPEAK NOT TO JACOB EITHER GOOD OR BAD.

For the meaning of the words *good or bad* see the commentary to Gen. 3:5, in which the phrase *the knowledge of good and bad* was shown to be equivalent to political knowledge and hence to imply political power.

25. THEN LABAN OVERTOOK JACOB. NOW JACOB HAD PITCHED HIS TENT IN THE MOUNT: AND LABAN WITH HIS BRETHREN PITCHED IN THE MOUNT OF GILEAD.

26. AND LABAN SAID TO JACOB, WHAT HAS THOU DONE, THAT THOU HAST STOLEN AWAY MY HEART IN THAT THOU HAST STOLEN AWAY MY DAUGHTERS, AS CAPTIVES TAKEN WITH THE SWORD?

27. WHEREFORE DIDST THOU FLEE AWAY SECRETLY. AND STEAL AWAY FROM ME AND DIDST NOT TELL ME, THAT I MIGHT HAVE SENT THEE AWAY WITH MIRTH, AND WITH SONG, WITH TABRET AND WITH HARP?

28. AND HAST NOT SUFFERED ME TO KISS MY SONS AND MY DAUGHTERS? THOU HAST NOW DONE FOOLISHLY IN SO DOING.

Laban accuses Jacob of stealing his daughters by force. He fully believed himself to have been able to command the love of his daughters and could not imagine that they would have fled by their own doing. He presents himself as a doting father who is genuinely hurt by the sudden departure of his children. As we shall see more fully in the commentary to Verse Forty-three this picture of his character is not completely false. Laban is a very wealthy man and would have enjoyed the ceremonies which he describes in Verse Twenty-seven since it would have been an occasion for him to assert his patriarchal position.

29. IT IS IN THE POWER OF THE GOD OF MY HAND TO DO BAD UNTO YOU: BUT THE GOD OF YOUR FATHER SPAKE UNTO ME YESTERNIGHT, SAYING, TAKE THOU HEED THAT THOU SPEAK NOT TO JACOB EITHER GOOD OR BAD.

30. AND NOW, THOUGH THOU Wouldest NEEDS BE GONE, BECAUSE THOU

SORE LONGEDST AFTER THY FATHER'S HOUSE, YET WHEREFORE HAST THOU STOLEN MY GODS?

Laban has become reconciled to the loss of his power over his daughters, Jacob, and their children. At the same time he wishes to remind Jacob of his magical powers and of the fact that he could have availed himself of *the God of my hand* rather than follow the commandment of *the God of your father*, had he so chosen. In this manner Laban can preserve his patriarchal role by presenting himself as the cause of Jacob's freedom. At the same time he speaks of *the God of your father* using the plural form of the word *your*, acknowledging his awareness that his daughters and grandchildren have joined the New Way.

While Laban had entertained hopes that one day Jacob would accept him as his patriarch and carry on the tradition of Haran, he can understand that Jacob wishes to return to his own fathers. What Laban cannot understand is why Jacob has stolen his gods, making it impossible even for his own sons to carry on that tradition.

31. AND JACOB ANSWERED AND SAID TO LABAN, BECAUSE I WAS AFRAID: FOR I SAID PERADVENTURE THOU WoulDEST TAKE BY FORCE THY DAUGHTERS FROM ME.

32. WITH WHOMSOEVER THOU FINDEST THY GODS, LET HIM NOT LIVE: BEFORE OUR BRETHREN DISCERN THOU WHAT IS THINE WITH ME, AND TAKE IT TO THEE. FOR JACOB KNEW NOT THAT RACHEL HAD STOLEN THEM.

In Verse Thirty-one the reason for Jacob's secrecy as well as his exaggeration of Laban's crimes is made explicit. Jacob was aware of the fact that Laban was what one might call a *big daddy*. The devotion to his children, which came to light in Verses Twenty-seven and Twenty-eight is based on his desire for possession. He would like to see all men happy, so long as they recognise him as the author of that happiness.

By referring to Laban's men as *our brethren* Jacob is able, at least in part, to assuage Laban by retaining some form of family tie.

33. AND LABAN WENT INTO JACOB'S TENT, AND INTO LEAH'S TENT AND INTO THE TWO MAIDSERVANTS' TENTS; BUT HE FOUND THEM NOT. THEN WENT HE OUT OF LEAH'S TENT AND ENTERED INTO RACHEL'S TENT.

In making the rounds of the tents Laban decided to search Rachel's tent last. In his mind she was the least suspicious in the family. Laban's failure to understand his daughters is not altogether unlike Isaac's blindness with regard to his sons. From what we know of them, it is more than likely that Rachel was the daughter who always sat on her daddy's lap, and Laban was undoubtedly well-pleased. Ironically, those very facets of Rachel's character

which led her to steal the *gods* were also the facets which made her the least suspect in Laban's eyes.

34. NOW RACHEL HAD TAKEN THE IMAGES, AND PUT THEM IN THE CAMEL'S FURNITURE, AND SAT UPON THEM. AND LABAN SEARCHED ALL THE TENT, BUT FOUND THEM NOT.

35. AND SHE SAID TO HER FATHER, LET IT NOT DISPLEASE MY LORD THAT I CANNOT RISE UP BEFORE THEE: FOR THE WAY OF WOMEN IS UPON ME. AND HE SEARCHED, BUT FOUND NOT THE IMAGES.

In grotesque parody Rachel mimics her husband by lying to her father, but Rachel's lie depends on Laban's decency in a delicate matter, and is therefore cowardly.

On the use of the word *way*, see the commentary to Gen. 18:11. In this instance, the word for *way* is the more normal word for a road, but the reflections concerning the status of nature in the commentary to Gen. 18:11 still hold force.

36. AND JACOB WAS WROTH, AND CHODE WITH LABAN: AND JACOB ANSWERED AND SAID TO LABAN, WHAT IS MY TRESPASS? WHAT IS MY SIN, THAT THOU HAST SO HOTLY PURSUED AFTER ME?

37. WHEREAS THOU HAST SEARCHED ALL MY STUFF, WHAT HAST THOU FOUND OF ALL THY HOUSEHOLD STUFF? SET IT HERE BEFORE MY BRETHREN AND THY BRETHREN, THAT THEY MAY JUDGE BETWIXT US BOTH.

Jacob is now able to use the compromise made in Verse Thirty-two to full advantage. By retaining family ties he can assert his independence by calling upon their common brothers to judge them. In so doing he has skillfully rendered harmless any claims which those ties can make upon him, without having to break them.

38. THIS TWENTY YEARS HAVE I BEEN WITH THEE: THY EWES AND THY SHE GOATS HAVE NOT MISCARRIED YOUNG, AND THE RAMS OF THY FLOCK HAVE I NOT EATEN.

It is possible that Verse Thirty-eight contains a pun, though to a large extent it all depends on how we are to understand Genesis 35:2. The Hebrew word for *ewes* is identical to Rachel's name in Hebrew. Therefore, the verse could be read *Your Rachel . . . has not miscarried*, in reference to the birth of Joseph. However, the sentence is more complicated. There are two Hebrew letters which, in the days of the author, were written in identical fashion, though one is pronounced like the English 's', and the other like the English 'sh'. The sentence read either way would make sense with regard to Rachel. If we take the alternative the sentence would read *I have not been able to make your Rachel wise*. This pun may indicate that Jacob has seen through Rachel's

trick and is quite aware of the presence of the gods. For further verification of this possibility see the commentary to Gen. 35:2.

39. THAT WHICH WAS TORN OF BEASTS I BROUGHT NOT UNTO THEE; I BARE THE LOSS OF IT; OF MY HAND DIDST THOU REQUIRE IT, WHETHER STOLEN BY DAY, OR STOLEN BY NIGHT.
40. THUS I WAS; IN THE DAY THE DROUGHT CONSUMED ME, AND THE FROST BY NIGHT, AND MY SLEEP DEPARTED MINE EYES.

In spite of Jacob's exaggerations to his wives concerning Laban his actual service seems to have been beyond reproach.

41. THUS HAVE I BEEN TWENTY YEARS IN THY HOUSE: I SERVED THEE FOURTEEN YEARS FOR THY TWO DAUGHTERS, AND SIX YEARS FOR THY CATTLE: AND THOU HAST CHANGED MY WAGES TEN TIMES.
42. EXCEPT THE GOD OF MY FATHER, THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE FEAR OF ISAAC, HAD BEEN WITH ME, SURELY THOU HADST SENT ME AWAY NOW EMPTY. GOD HATH SEEN MINE AFFLICTION AND THE LABOUR OF MY HANDS, AND REBUKED THEE YESTERNIGHT.

The words which have been translated *the fear of Isaac* are unclear, because they contain the same ambiguity which the genitive or possessive usually does in English. It is difficult to understand whether the words of Jacob are to be taken as a subjective or objective genitive. It is similar to asking whether "Caesar's murderers" are those people whom Caesar sends out to murder or whether they refer to Brutus and Cassius. Here we are faced with deciding whether Jacob has referred to the God whom Isaac fears, or the God on account of whom one must fear Isaac. The latter interpretation, however, seems more likely under the circumstances. In this sense, there might be a reference to Genesis 26:29, in which Abimelech finally perceived that which was to be feared in Isaac. However, in the light of Chapter Twenty-seven, where he was forced to lie to a blind old man in order to obtain the blessing that was denied to Abimelech, one must wonder what strange mixture of thoughts was going through Jacob's mind as he spoke to Laban.

43. AND LABAN ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO JACOB, THESE DAUGHTERS ARE MY DAUGHTERS, AND THESE CHILDREN ARE MY CHILDREN, AND THESE CATTLE ARE MY CATTLE, AND ALL THAT THOU SEEST IS MINE; AND WHAT CAN I DO THIS DAY UNTO THESE MY DAUGHTERS, OR UNTO THEIR CHILDREN WHICH THEY HAVE BORN?

In Verse Forty-three we finally have a clear statement of Laban's position. Though benevolent, he claims the right to complete mastery over his descendants. The Hebrew contains a beautiful ambiguity making it unclear whether one should translate *what can I do this day unto these my daughters* or *what*

can I do this day for my daughters. The reader is never quite sure whether Laban's words are intended as a threat, or whether they are words of frustration because he can no longer be the sole cause of their prosperity nor can he give them his own way of life.

44. NOW THEREFORE COME THOU, LET US MAKE A COVENANT, I AND THOU;
AND LET IT BE FOR A WITNESS BETWEEN ME AND THEE.

Laban, willing to admit that he has lost, wishes to establish a covenant which would recognize the independence of each house. In this sense, he hopes at least to achieve parity with the New Way.

45. AND JACOB TOOK A STONE, AND SET IT UP FOR A PILLAR.

46. AND JACOB SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, GATHER STONES; AND THEY TOOK STONES, AND MADE AN HEAP: AND THEY DID EAT THERE UPON THE HEAP.

47. AND LABAN CALLED IT JEGAR-SAHADUTHA: BUT JACOB CALLED IT GALEED.

48. AND LABAN SAID, THIS HEAP IS A WITNESS BETWEEN ME AND THEE THIS DAY. THEREFORE WAS THE NAME OF IT CALLED GALEED;

49. AND MIZPAH; FOR HE SAID, THE LORD WATCH BETWEEN ME AND THEE, WHEN WE ARE ABSENT ONE FROM ANOTHER.

50. IF THOU SHALT AFFLICT MY DAUGHTERS, OR IF THOU SHALT TAKE OTHER WIVES BESIDE MY DAUGHTERS, NO MAN IS WITH US; SEE, GOD IS WITNESS BETWIXT ME AND THEE.

51. AND LABAN SAID TO JACOB, BEHOLD THIS HEAP, AND BEHOLD THIS PILLAR, WHICH I HAVE CAST BETWIXT ME AND THEE;

52. THIS HEAP BE WITNESS AND THIS PILLAR BE WITNESS, THAT I WILL NOT PASS OVER THIS HEAP TO THEE, AND THAT THOU SHALT NOT PASS OVER THIS HEAP AND THIS PILLAR UNTO ME, FOR HARM.

This covenant established the borders between Syria and Israel. They are different in character from those which were established with the Philistines. The Philistine border separated people who were at opposite poles. As we remember, it, like the firmament of heaven, divided a small realm of order from the surrounding world of chaos. The border with Syria was established by men of the same family at a time of friendship and was made clear by a great heap of stones called Galeed. The covenant is impartial to the superiority of either side, and hence the heap is also given an Aramaic name, Jegar-Sahadutha. This border, unlike the Philistine border, does not mark a sharp distinction between two different worlds. Part of Laban's world, his daughters and grandchildren, now lives on the other side. We must consider that relationship in the following paragraphs, in which we shall try to outline the consequences of this covenant.

The terms of the covenant are unclear. Abrabanel in his commentary² suggests that it would have been better to translate Verse Fifty-two as: *if you fail to come over in times of trouble then I will not come over to you in time of trouble*. In other words, Abrabanel understands the covenant as a treaty of mutual alliance rather than merely a treaty of non-aggression.

The curious role which Syria plays in the coming to be of the New Way emerges in their first contact. After the death of Joshua there was a deterioration in the lives of the people. God's original dream was for a loosely-connected group of tribes deriving their unity from the joint celebration of the Jubilee Year. We must remember that Moses was even forced to remind God at the time of his death that a new leader had to be appointed. Apparently, had men been up to it, Joshua would not have been needed, and the several tribes would have lived in harmony (Num. 27:15ff.).

After the death of Joshua there was a glorious but short-lived period in which the tribes lived together in comradeship without a leader (Judg. 1:1-3). but their freedom also meant their disunity, and they quickly began to mingle with the Canaanites and to accept their gods. In punishment for their laxities *God sold Israel into the hands of Syria* (Judg. 3:8). Othniel, Caleb's younger kinsman, was able to save the people in a short war. This apparently insignificant incident was to establish a relationship between Israel and Syria that would continue until each was destroyed. Even the phraseology is of special importance since both the fact that God used the Syrians as his special instrument and the fact that God's action is couched in terms of money will play a role in the future history of their relationship.

The next battle between Syria and Israel came about when the Syrians were suddenly attacked by David (see II Sam. 8:5). A third skirmish occurred when Syria attacked, not in its own name, but as mercenaries in the pay of the Ammonites (II Sam. 10:6). During the battle the Syrian forces suffered a great defeat, but their leader, Hadad, escaped to Egypt, only to return after the death of King David (I Kings 11:16-21).

The serious relationship between Israel and Syria began in the reign of King Asa of Judah when Baasha of Israel built the fortified city of Ramah on the borders of Judah. At that time King Asa hired the Syrians in order to attack the northern kingdom, in hopes of destroying Ramah. Asa appealed to the Syrians on the grounds of *a league between thee and me and between thy father and my father* (I Kings 15:17-21). Since there is no mention of any other treaty between Syria and the Sons of Jacob, we must assume that the formal treaty which began what will turn out to be a strange series of wars is the treaty which appears here in the Book of Genesis.

Unfortunately the taste for foreign wealth, which he was paid for destroying Ramah, led Benhadad, the Syrian king, to threaten the complete destruction of

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 334.

the northern kingdom if they did not pay him a great price. The men of Israel refused to pay and were able to repel the forces of Benhadad (I Kings 20).

Between the two wars, a strange prophet arose in Israel who was unlike the men that we have seen so far, such as Samuel and Nathan. The earlier Prophets were at home in the palace and reprimanded the kings from within. They were wise men, but they were rarely mysterious men. The new prophet was a man who lived with the people. He fought openly against the king, and his tools were rhetoric and miracles. Unlike the miracles at the time of Moses, which were meant to save a whole people from starvation or from a great advancing army, these miracles would often touch only one family. The name of the first such prophet was Elijah (I Kings 17:18).

Elijah's disfavor at court was caused largely by Ahab's wife, Jezebel, a follower of the prophets of Baal who had persuaded Ahab to outlaw the prophets of the Lord. It is in this context that bands of prophets who seemed to be men of low degree even as late as the reign of King Saul became respectable in some quarters.

One can see a similar movement in the works of Tacitus. When the state as a whole became petty and the individual wishes of the sovereign became of prime importance, those men who in better times would have thought themselves part of the state now looked for a private and more individual world within which to live. In such days, when high political goals are no longer available, those who are not directly involved in the pettiness of the great often search for a more private way. Their search for a replacement of the lost political whole leads them to a desire for personal unity with a cosmic whole. In this way, the band of prophets who could only invoke our laughter in the days of David and Saul now become a fascinating alternative to much of mankind.

During Jezebel's persecution of the prophets, Elijah *arose, ate and drank and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God* (I Kings 19:8). During this period Elijah was sent to anoint Jehu, the son of Nimshi, to be king over Israel, and Hazael to be king over Syria, as if Syria were an integral part of the New Way (I Kings, Chaps. 18 and 19).

After Ahab's victory over the Syrians the author tells another curious story. King Ahab saw the vineyard of a man named Naboth near his house and decided that he wanted it. Being the king he offered Naboth a larger and much better vineyard for it. Naboth replied: *The Lord forbiddeth me that I should give the inheritance of my father unto thee* (I Kings 21:3). But Ahab had a wife named Jezebel. It would be difficult to imagine having to take such facts into consideration when one is discussing the relationship between David and Nathan. But the results in the story of Naboth are clear. Jezebel had Naboth killed and presented the vineyard as a gift to her husband, Ahab. The story of Naboth was the story of a man who preferred his father's vineyard to the vineyard of a king.

David had done much worse. With the help of Joab he killed Uriah because of his desires for Bath-sheba, while Ahab killed no one. But David's passions were his own and Ahab was henpecked.

David lost the kingship because of Bath-sheba, and Ahab died for a vineyard. Nathan's simple parable of the lamb, spoken privately and quietly to a close friend, was sufficient to remind David of what he had done (II Sam. 12:1-13). But times were different. Ahab was not David, and Elijah was not Nathan. Elijah shouted the whole bloody mess from a rooftop, and still Ahab could not hear.

Following the story of Naboth's vineyard, there is the story of the false attempt to reunify the North and the South during the war in which Jehoshaphat and Ahab attacked Syria in order to take the heights of Gilead, the country in which Laban and Jacob signed their treaty. During this war Ahab was killed because he had not learned the wisdom of Naboth.

The first chapters of the Second Book of Kings are filled with the apparently trivial stories of Elijah and his petty miracles among the people. However, one of his followers, a little peasant girl, was sold as a slave to Naaman, the captain of the Syrian army and a leper (II Kings 5:2). The young girl persuaded Naaman to go to Elijah to be cured. The cure-all immediately led to Naaman's becoming a crypto-follower of Elijah, and led a new relationship between Syria and Israel.

Chapter Six contains another war between Syria and Israel or, perhaps one should say, a war between Syria and Elijah. It is one of the strangest non-wars which was never fought in history. The King of Syria decided to make war on Israel. But the King of Israel was able to escape thanks to the advice of Elijah who had miraculous knowledge of all that the King of Syria planned, even in the privacy of his own bedchamber (II Kings 6:12).

A band of Syrians was then sent to capture Elijah. His own followers were frightened, but Elijah prayed to the Lord to open their eyes and they saw a great valley full of fiery chariots. Elijah threw a fog around the Syrians, and when the fog lifted they found themselves in Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom. The war ends with the following statement: *So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel* (II Kings 6:23).

But what seemed to be a most miraculous ending proved only a beginning, for the next verse reads: *And it came to pass after this that Ben Hadad gathered all his host and went up and besieged Samaria* (II Kings 6:24). The band had left only to be replaced by the whole army. The siege looked desperate, and there was not a bit of food in the city, but because of Elijah the whole Syrian army, thinking they heard the hoofs of a great army, suddenly left one night, leaving their food for the starving city (II Kings 7:6-16).

After the war which wasn't, the King of Syria became ill and, having heard of the fame that Elijah had got during the time he spent among the people, sent his servant Hazeel to find out his fate. Elijah told the servant to tell the king that he would certainly recover, though, as he told Hazeel privately, the king

would not recover. Elijah then began to weep. Now we must remember that this servant, Hazael, is the man whom Elijah had already been sent to anoint as King of Syria (I Kings 19:15). When Hazael asked Elijah why he wept Elijah told him that he, Hazael, God's anointed King of the land of Syria, would do great harm to the Children of Israel (II Kings 8:12). This apparent contradiction, as we shall see, is central to the theme of Israel's relationship to Syria as understood by the author. Syria, from this point on, will in an ever-increasing way continue the role of God's whip, which it had assumed back in the first chapter of the Book of Judges, where our story began when *God sold Israel into the hands of Syria*.

In the following verses Hazael became King of Syria (II Kings 8:15), and Jehu, who had also been anointed by Elijah, became King of Israel (II Kings 9:6). Jehu successfully killed the sons of King Ahab, their mother Jezebel, and all of her followers, who had turned to the worship of Baal. Though he destroyed much of the corruption into which Jezebel had led the country, he himself did not follow the ways of the Lord, and the Lord sent Hazael to attack the north (II Kings 10).

Meanwhile, in the southern kingdom, there was a great confusion in the ruling line which only by good fortune led to the reign of King Jehoash. The reign of Jehoash was the first glimmer of sobriety that either nation had known in a long time. Through the mismanagement of the priests the Temple had fallen into disrepair, its coffers empty and the people over-taxed. In spite of this situation the High Priest, by putting a box in the sanctuary, was able to collect enough wealth from the donations of the already over-burdened people to repair the Temple. But suddenly Hazael, God's anointed whip for the north, overshot his mark, turned upon the south, and plundered the Temple (II Kings, Chaps. 11 and 12).

Apparently without reflecting on the consequences of the last campaign, God once again sent Hazael into the north against Jehoaz, the son of Jehu (II Kings 13:3). Sometime after that campaign was over the Lord again used his Syrian whip. This time he sent Rezin, the King of Syria, to punish Judah in the south (II Kings 15:37). During the attack Ahaz, who was then ruling the south, sent for help to Tiglathpeleser, King of Assyria. But the price for Assyrian help was the gold and the silver that was in the House of the Lord (II Kings 16:7). That was Syria's final battle. Her forces were completely defeated, and the country became a permanent province within the Assyrian Empire. Unfortunately, Israel had failed to learn the final lesson taught by Syria when it attacked King Jehoash—that whips often go beyond their mark. The Assyrian army which was called on to put a final end to the delicate balance between Syria and Israel, which had lasted since the days of the Judges, returned five years later under the leadership of Shalmaneser, and the northern kingdom was utterly destroyed.

The covenant made that day between Laban and Jacob lasted twelve years.

Israel was in constant need of a goad, and God appointed Syria that task. When Israel tried to rid herself of the Whip she lost ten of her tribes.

When Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, came to destroy the little that remained, Gedaliah, the last regent of the south, was captured and killed in the city of Mizpah, the site on which the covenant of Jacob and Laban had been made.

We began by comparing Syria in the east with Philistia toward the sea. The one was that great otherness who could never be beaten; the other was part of ourselves. They were our mother, Rachel; they were our whip. Jehu and Hazael were anointed with the same oil. Syria was the beatable enemy, but to beat them meant death.

But what, then, is history in the hand of our author? There can be two answers.

According to the traditional understanding, which was shared by the mass of men living in the west up until recent times, history was the providential plan of a Divine Being who cared for justice and who ensured that history worked toward that goal. That tradition also understood the Book of Kings to be a perfect account of those times inspired by that same Divine Being.

In modern times scholars have openly disagreed with this assumption and have substituted for it the notion that the Book of Kings was of human origin, but unfortunately they have not reckoned with the consequences of that assumption.

One minor example of the difficulty is as follows: we pointed out some time ago that the necessity of a king in Israel became clear when the Bethlehemite concubine of a Levite from Ephraim was horribly misused by the men of Gibeah, in whose city they had spent the night since Jerusalem was still in the hands of the Jebusites (see commentary to Gen. 22:6). The Biblical account of that story is only intelligible when we remember that for Israel to have a king necessarily implies that Israel will also require a prophet. Thus it was that Samuel, born of a prayer offered in Shiloh, was from Ephraim, that Saul, the first king, was from the city of Gibeah, and that David, the true king, not only came from Bethlehem, but was finally able to conquer the city of Jerusalem.

Had that account been an isolated incident, one might have assumed it to be the work of chance, in spite of the fact that there are five names that play crucial roles in both stories, and that the first story is clearly intended by the author to give a reason for the necessity of the second story. The consistency of Syria's actions might also be accidental. But, as we saw in the case of the date of Noah's birth, such things have happened before. In what remains of our commentary we hope to convince the reader that such accounts occur too often to ascribe them to chance.

If one does not make the traditional assumption that history is arranged by a Divine Being one must give another account of such a story. One would sup-

pose that in the days of the author there were many stories about a man named Samuel, and one is reminded of the line *Some say John Henry was from England, Some say that he was from Spain, I say he was nothing but a Louisiana man, And a leader of a steel driving gang*. If this line from an American folk tune adequately describes the accounts which faced the redactor, he was free to arrange his materials in the most meaningful way. Samuel was from Ephraim because of the Levite. So far as one can tell, as many cities might have claimed Samuel as there have been countries claiming John Henry. But for our author he could only have come from Ephraim.

The attempts of modern scholars to find out "what really happened," given the assumption that there is not a Divine Providence in the simplest sense of the word, would then be even more difficult than trying to rewrite the history of fourteenth-century England on the basis of Childe's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, or even in the light of nothing more than a thoughtful book based on them.

The Syrian wars also tell a tale. Laban's covenant with Jacob preserved Israel from herself by providing her with the whip she needed. The numerous Books of Chronicles which the author mentions throughout the Book of Kings must have contained the accounts of these wars, and in the hands of our author they became a tale.

53. THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF NAHOR, THE GOD OF THEIR FATHER, JUDGE BETWIXT US. AND JACOB SWARE BY THE FEAR OF HIS FATHER ISAAC.

54. THEN JACOB OFFERED SACRIFICE UPON THE MOUNT, AND CALLED HIS BRETHREN TO EAT BREAD: AND THEY DID EAT BREAD, AND TARRIED ALL NIGHT IN THE MOUNT.

Laban swears by the God of Abraham and by the God of Nahor, Abraham's brother. These are the two gods which Laban sees as being joined on that day. He also swears by the god of Terah, whom he understands to be higher than either. In Laban's eyes two great traditions will live side by side and will be judged by one which is beyond both. Jacob swears by the solidity of tradition (see commentary to Gen. 31:42).

CHAPTER XXXII

1. AND EARLY IN THE MORNING LABAN ROSE UP, AND KISSED HIS SONS AND HIS DAUGHTERS, AND BLESSED THEM: AND LABAN DEPARTED, AND RETURNED UNTO HIS PLACE.

2. AND JACOB WENT ON HIS WAY, AND THE ANGELS OF GOD MET HIM.

3. AND WHEN JACOB SAW THEM HE SAID, THIS IS GOD'S HOST; AND HE CALLED THE NAME OF THAT PLACE MAHANAIM.

There is some discrepancy about the status of these three verses. The tradition seems to be divided as to whether they belong to the story of Laban or to the story of Esau. We have followed the Hebrew text as it has been generally accepted in the West. The more orthodox division within the Jewish tradition begins the section with Verse Four. The King James translators begin the chapter with Verse Two.

Jacob gave the name *Mahanaim* to the place in which he saw the angels. In English the name means *The Two-Camps*. In addition to the obvious reference to the distinction between Esau's camp and Jacob's camp in Verse Seven of the present chapter, the name may have been given for other reasons as well. Jacob thinks of the angels as being divided into two camps, perhaps because of the relationship between Syria and Israel, both of whom have their role to play in the New Way. These considerations may have led him to remember another division which was still in need of clarification—the division between him and his brother, Esau.

Mahanaim, the city of the two camps, fully lived up to its name. At the death of King Saul, Mahanaim became the capital of Ishbosheth, whom Abner anointed king in place of David (II Sam. 2:8–29). But when David was forced to flee Jerusalem during Absalom's revolt and had all but lost the country, provisions were given to him by Shobi, Machin and Barzilai, again in the city of Mahanaim. Twice during the history of Israel it played a role in the division of the country into two opposite camps.

During the revolt of Absalom a man named Shimei, from the house of Saul, took advantage of David's weak position to curse him for having taken the kingdom. David's men were about to kill Shimei when David stopped them (II Sam. 16:5–11). Apparently, he realized a certain justice in the man's curses, even though it eventually became necessary for him to advise his son, Solomon, to have Shimei killed (II Sam. 17:24–27; I Kings 2:8,9). Shimei's curse, which bore its fruit when north and south were completely severed under Jeroboam, was also placed upon the House of David while Shimei was in the City of the Two-Camps. Apart from the long lists of cities mentioned in the Book of Joshua, the city of Mahanaim never appears outside of this context in the Bible.

4. AND JACOB SENT MESSENGERS BEFORE HIM TO ESAU HIS BROTHER UNTO THE LAND OF SEIR, THE COUNTRY OF EDOM.

Throughout the whole of this chapter it will be essential to remember that Jacob sent messengers to his brother, Esau. The meeting was neither accidental nor was it forced upon Jacob. The chapter itself falls apparently into two main sections. In the first section Jacob, contrary to his nature, will appear as a coward and has been interpreted as such by many readers. In the latter section he will fight a battle adequate to any Greek hero. In the light of this con-

tradition it may become necessary to revise the traditional understanding of the first section.

5. AND HE COMMANDED THEM, SAYING, THUS SHALL YE SPEAK UNTO MY LORD ESAU; THY SERVANT JACOB SAITH THUS, I HAVE SOJOURNED WITH LABAN, AND STAYED THERE UNTIL NOW:
6. AND I HAVE OXEN, AND ASSES, FLOCKS, AND MENSERVANTS, AND WOMEN-SERVANTS: AND I HAVE SENT TO TELL MY LORD, THAT I MAY FIND GRACE IN THY SIGHT.

Jacob introduced himself in the politest way possible. We can now understand the reasons for what some people call Jacob's greed in the preceding chapter. In spite of the blessing, Jacob had left Isaac empty-handed, and it is crucial that he show Esau that from an economic point of view he had become independent and did not pose any burden or threat to his brother.

7. AND THE MESSENGERS RETURNED TO JACOB, SAYING, WE CAME TO THY BROTHER ESAU, AND ALSO HE COMETH TO MEET THEE, AND FOUR HUNDRED MEN WITH HIM.

On the basis of the grammar of this verse it is difficult if not impossible to know whether Esau left home when he received the news from Jacob's messenger or whether he had advance knowledge and was already on his way when he met the messenger.

On the *four hundred men* see commentary to Gen. 33:1.

8. THEN JACOB WAS GREATLY AFRAID AND DISTRESSED: AND HE DIVIDED THE PEOPLE THAT WAS WITH HIM, AND THE FLOCKS, AND HERDS, AND THE CAMELS, INTO TWO BANDS;
9. AND SAID, IF ESAU COME TO THE ONE COMPANY, AND SMITE IT, THEN THE OTHER COMPANY WHICH IS LEFT SHALL ESCAPE.

If trouble starts Jacob considers only two possibilities: he will either be captured or he will escape. He does not consider the possibility of attacking his brother. The word which we have translated *distressed* is usually translated *fear*, but it can also mean *distressed*, especially with regard to difficult or horrible situations among friends or family. It was the same feeling which Amnon had when he felt an unconquerable desire for his sister Tamar (II Sam. 13:2), and it was also the feeling which David felt after the attack on Ziklag, where his wives were captured and his own men about to stone him (I Sam. 30:6).

The division of Jacob's camp in two is surely part of the reason for his having named the place The Two-Camps, but it also reminds us of the more important division between the two brothers.

10. AND JACOB SAID, O GOD OF MY FATHER, ABRAHAM, AND GOD OF MY FATHER, ISAAC, THE LORD WHICH SAIDST UNTO ME, RETURN UNTO THY COUNTRY, AND TO THY KINDRED, AND I WILL DEAL WELL WITH THEE:
11. I AM NOT WORTHY OF THE LEAST OF ALL THE MERCIES, AND OF ALL THE TRUTH, WHICH THOU HAS SHEWED UNTO THY SERVANT: FOR WITH MY STAFF I PASSED OVER THIS JORDAN; AND NOW I AM BECOME TWO CAMPS.
12. DELIVER ME, I PRAY THEE, FROM THE HAND OF MY BROTHER, FROM THE HAND OF ESAU: FOR I FEAR HIM, LEST HE WILL COME AND SMITE ME, MOTHER WITH CHILD.

Jacob crossed the river with his magical staff, which had served him well in Laban's country by insuring the proper birth of the cattle (see commentary to Gen. 30:37), but on this side of the river there is no magic. Jacob fears that Esau may try to destroy the whole of his line in order to recapture the birthright.

13. AND THOU SAIDST, I WILL SURELY DO THEE GOOD, AND MAKE THY SEED AS THE SAND OF THE SEA, WHICH CANNOT BE NUMBERED FOR MULTITUDE.

In Verse Thirteen Jacob makes reference to the other half of God's blessing to Abraham, the half which Isaac did not receive. As we remember, God's blessing to Abraham contained two similes for manyness. The first simile was the stars of the heavens; the other, the sand on the seashore. Isaac's blessing only contained a reference to the highest simile, the stars of the sky. God saw no reason to confuse him by giving him the lower blessing because, unlike Jacob, he was never forced to face the threats and trials which Jacob would meet. Jacob, as we shall see in this chapter, is more aware of the lower and more difficult side of the blessing.

14. AND HE LODGED THERE THAT SAME NIGHT; AND TOOK OF THAT WHICH CAME TO HIS HAND A PRESENT FOR ESAU HIS BROTHER;

The phrase *of that which came to his hand* would tend to substantiate what was said in the commentary to Verse Five.

15. TWO HUNDRED SHE GOATS, AND TWENTY HE GOATS, TWO HUNDRED EWES, AND TWENTY RAMS.
16. THIRTY MILCH CAMELS WITH THEIR COLTS, FORTY KINE, AND TEN BULLS, TWENTY SHE ASSES, AND TEN FOALS.
17. AND HE DELIVERED THEM INTO THE HAND OF HIS SERVANTS, EVERY DROVE BY THEMSELVES; AND SAID UNTO HIS SERVANTS, PASS OVER BEFORE ME, AND PUT A SPACE BETWIXT DROVE AND DROVE.
18. AND HE COMMANDED THE FOREMOST, SAYING, WHEN ESAU MY BROTHER MEETETH THEE, AND ASKETH THEE, SAYING, WHOSE ART THOU? AND WHITHER GOEST THOU? AND WHOSE ARE THESE BEFORE THEE?

19. THEN THOU SHALT SAY, THEY BE THY SERVANT JACOB'S: IT IS A PRESENT SENT UNTO MY LORD ESAU: AND, BEHOLD, ALSO HE IS BEHIND US.
20. AND SO COMMANDED HE THE SECOND, AND THE THIRD, AND ALL THAT FOLLOWED THE DROVES, SAYING, ON THIS MANNER SHALL YE SPEAK UNTO ESAU, WHEN YE FIND HIM.
21. AND SAY YE MOREOVER, BEHOLD, THY SERVANT JACOB IS BEHIND US, FOR HE SAID, I WILL APPEASE HIM WITH THE PRESENT THAT GOETH BEFORE ME, AND AFTERWARDS I WILL SEE HIS FACE: PERADVENTURE HE WILL ACCEPT OF ME.

The words which have been translated *peradventure he will accept of me* are literally *perhaps he will lift my face*. It is the expression which was discussed at length in the commentary to Gen. 19:21. Jacob hopes that Esau will be willing to accept him as the recipient of the New Way in spite of the natural order.

22. SO WENT THE PRESENT OVER BEFORE HIM: AND HIMSELF LODGED THAT NIGHT IN THE COMPANY.
23. AND HE ROSE UP THAT NIGHT, AND TOOK HIS TWO WIVES, AND HIS TWO WOMENSERVANTS, AND HIS ELEVEN SONS, AND PASSED OVER THE FORD JABBOK.
24. AND HE TOOK THEM, AND SENT THEM OVER THE BROOK, AND SENT OVER THAT HE HAD.

The *Ford of Jabbok* was the limit of the war between Israel and Sihon (Num. 21:24). It was established as the border between Israel and their brothers, the Ammonites, the sons of Lot. Although they did not take part in the war with the Amorites in the time of Balak, the Ammonites were sent by the Lord to punish Israel at the time of Jephthah, the man who foolishly sacrificed his own daughter. Shortly after the establishment of Saul's kingship the Ammonites, under the rule of King Nahash, again attacked in what proved to be Saul's first battle. The call to arms which Saul made by sending out the divided carcass of an ox (see commentary to Gen. 22:6) was his first decisive act as king and led to the unification of the people.

About the same time that David became king, Nahash died, and David sent letters of condolence to Hanum, the son of Nahash, saying: *Then said David, I will show kindness unto Hanum the son of Nahash as his father showed kindness unto me, and David sent to comfort him by the hands of his servants for his father and David's servants came unto the land of the children of Ammon* (II Sam. 10:2). Since Nahash had fought a war with Saul it is conceivable that David had become friendly with him during that war. Nonetheless, no such friendship was ever mentioned in the Bible, and bearing in mind the war between Israel and Ammon, David's words do appear a bit suspicious. At any rate, so it seemed to the princes of Ammon, who advised Hanum not to accept

David's offer of friendship. A war ensued, and for the second time in its history Jabbok was the scene of a bitter battle between brother and brother. Since the days of Esau and Jacob fratricide seems to have haunted the river, revealing itself through Jephthah and David.

25. AND JACOB WAS LEFT ALONE; AND THERE WRESTLED A MAN WITH HIM UNTIL THE BREAKING OF THE DAY.

Jacob spent the night alone preparing to meet his brother, full of doubts as to what the outcome would be. No man has ever been described as being *alone* since Man in the Garden before Eve was made. That same combination of the highest and the lowest, the fullest and the emptiest, which God perceived in Man must have gone through Jacob's thoughts and feelings that night. Jacob's lonely night turns out to be the night of a hero in the Greek sense of the word. He wrestles with a being greater than himself, standing on his own two feet and in a foreign land. As we shall see in the commentary to Verse Thirty-two, Jacob was the last man ever to fight such a battle, or who will ever face being alone in such a way, in the Bible.

26. AND WHEN HE SAW THAT HE PREVAILED NOT AGAINST HIM, HE TOUCHED THE HOLLOW OF HIS THIGH; AND THE HOLLOW OF JACOB'S THIGH WAS OUT OF JOINT, AS HE WRESTLED WITH HIM.

27. AND HE SAID, LET ME GO FOR THE DAY BREAKETH, AND HE SAID, I WILL NOT LET THEE GO, EXCEPT THOU BLESS ME.

During the battle the sides are evenly matched. When fighting as a man the being is not able to overcome Jacob. As the sun was about to rise he touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh and the thigh was put out of joint. In Biblical anatomy the thigh represents the progeny, those who are to come after (see Gen. 24:2 and commentary). All of Jacob's sons have, in one way or another, been touched. From that day on they will limp a bit as did Jacob, and perhaps there will be no room within the foundations of the New Way for such a battle ever to take place again.

God had blessed many men during the course of the book, but no man had ever asked for a blessing. Suddenly, Jacob has not only asked but even demanded one. In the past, blessings have implied the uncertainty of the future, but the heroic implies a full command of the situation and at this moment Jacob is a hero. Why then should Jacob take this moment to demand a blessing? Such a feeling could only arise in a man capable of facing what he would rather not meet. We shall see more of this as the story unfolds.

28. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM. WHAT IS THY NAME? AND HE SAID, JACOB.

29. AND HE SAID, THY NAME SHALL BE CALLED NO MORE JACOB, BUT ISRAEL: FOR AS A PRINCE HAST THOU POWER WITH GOD AND WITH MEN, AND HAS PREVAILED.

30. AND JACOB ASKED HIM, AND SAID, TELL ME, I PRAY THEE, THY NAME.
AND HE SAID, WHEREFORE IS IT THAT THOU DOST ASK AFTER MY NAME?
AND HE BLESSED HIM THERE.
31. AND JACOB CALLED THE NAME OF THE PLACE PENIEL: FOR I HAVE SEEN
GOD FACE TO FACE, AND MY LIFE IS PRESERVED.

The city of Peniel, which is sometimes called Penuel, will be mentioned twice again in the Bible. Gideon, as nice a fellow as one might meet on a summer's day, was once chasing two kings of Midian, Zabah and Zalmunna. The Midianites were descendants of Abraham through his wife, Keturah (Gen. 25:2), hence even closer to Israel than the sons of Ammon mentioned in the last commentary. While chasing Midian the men of Gideon came to Penuel asking for food and shelter, but were turned away. They finally caught the king of Midian, but were about to let them free when Gideon discovered that they had killed all of *his brothers*. He told his oldest son to kill the kings, but he could not do it, perhaps because Midian, too, was *his brother*. But Gideon himself saw what was needed. The kings were killed, his brothers, and the men of Penuel with them (Judg., Chap. 8).

Penuel is mentioned one more time in the Bible. Immediately after Jeroboam's revolt, which led to the division of the country into two separate monarchies, the text reads as follows:

Then Jeroboam built Schehem in Mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and went out from thence, and built Penuel. And Jeroboam said in his heart, now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their Lord, even unto Rehoboam King of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam King of Judah. Whereupon the King took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of Egypt. And he set the one in Bethel, and the other put he in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan. (I Kings 12:25-30)

Penuel was the city in which Jeroboam made his decision to build the shrines of the north which, in the author's eyes, were the symbols which divided Israel from Judah, brother from brother, and caused the wars between them (see commentary to Gen. 20:7). Gideon and his brothers, the Moabites, Judah and Israel—throughout its history Penuel, like the Jabbok, had been the scene of fratricide.

After leaving his brother, Jacob would build the first house ever to be erected by a follower of the New Way (Gen. 33:17), and he is about to establish a New People who will conquer their own land. Jacob's great fear is not that he will be killed by his brother but that he will be forced to repeat the act of the founder of the first city—Cain.

Verse Thirty-one, which reads *and Jacob called the name of the place*

Peniel; for I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved, contains a play on words, since the name *Peniel* or *Penuel* means *the face of God*. In Gen. 33:10 Jacob will liken this *face* to the face of his brother, Esau, and it was mentioned twice in connection with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:13, 27). Aside from one passage in Deuteronomy which will be discussed later in this commentary the phrase will only appear five more times in the Bible. Although they are apparently not connected with one another they are all to be found in the book of Exodus between 32:11 and 34:24.

Israel was worshipping the Golden Calf, but Moses was still up on the mountain when—

The Lord said to Moses, I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people: now therefore let Me alone, that My wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make thee a great nation.

The text continues:

And Moses besought the face of the Lord, his God, and said, Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people, which Thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with a great power, and with a mighty hand? Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did He bring them out to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from Thy fierce wrath and repent this evil against Thy people. Remember Abraham and Isaac and Israel, Thy servants to whom Thou swarest by Thine own self. (Ex. 32:9-13)

God is as wedded to Israel as they are to Him. Moses' argument is that if Israel fails God will have failed too. If Israel is destroyed what will God do for a people? Could He pick up the pieces and start again? How could another people ever trust Him? But all this happened before Moses discovered what they had done. When Moses returned to the camp he meted out speedy punishment and returned to God to make atonement for the people. This time he said:

Yet now if You will forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book which Thou hast written. And the Lord said unto Moses, Whosoever hath sinned against Me him will I blot out of My book. (Ex. 32:32,33)

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses had a more distant relation to the people than he had ever had before. The story of this change has already been told in the commentary to Gen. 15:9. At that time it was said that *The Lord spoke with Moses face to face* (Ex. 33:11). After Moses had requested that God show him His ways in order that he might be able to meet the requirements of his new position, God answered: *My face shall be with thee* (Ex. 32:14).

But when Moses asked to see that face he was told *Thou canst not see My face: for there shall be no man see My face and live* (Ex. 33:20). However, it is unclear as yet what relation there is between the *face* of God and death.

Instead of revealing His *face* to Moses, God decides to answer the needs in another way. He says: *And it shall come to pass while My glory passeth by*

that I will put thee in a cleft of a rock and will cover thee with My hand while I pass by: and I will take away Mine hand and thou shalt see My back but My face will not be seen (Ex. 33:22,23). What Moses in fact saw is described in the chapter which follows the one containing Moses' request. The relevant verses read:

And the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands (of generations), forgiving iniquity and transgressions and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty: visiting the iniquity of the father upon the children, and upon the children's children unto the third and fourth generations. (Ex. 34:6,7)

What Moses saw was the great effect which, according to the Bible, tradition may have upon the men who are born into it. Perhaps the most fundamental teaching of the Bible is the radical importance of traditions upon the lives of those who share them, whether those traditions be bad or good. It is the further claim of the Bible that ultimately just and good traditions outlast bad traditions, but that even bad traditions have a strong hold on the souls of mankind.

This theme was mentioned in the commentary to Gen. 26:11 where we discussed several verses in which this theme was repeated. Aside from this and the related passages the words *visit the iniquity* will appear only once again in the books of the Bible with which we have principally been concerned. In the Book of Leviticus there is a long passage which begins: *None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness: I am the Lord. The nakedness of thy father or the nakedness of thy mother shalt thou not* (Lev. 18:6ff.).

The passage continues by listing the various forms which the sin of Ham can take as well as laws against homosexuality and sodomy. The section then ends by saying: *Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: and the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants* (Lev. 18:24,25).

In this case, too, the term *visit the iniquity* does not refer to individual punishment for an individual sin. The land of Canaan had become like the world which had existed prior to the Flood. It was not the actions of individual men but the foundations on which its tradition rested which had decayed and had to be replaced.

These two notions—the *face of God* and *visit the iniquity*—appear to be connected with the foundations underlying tradition. *The face of God* in that sense is the guarantor of just traditions. It ensures that just traditions will last longer than unjust traditions.

Chapter Thirty-four of the Book of Exodus, which begins with the description of God's back, ends with the laws concerning the annual sacrifice at *the*

place which God shall mention. Verse Twenty-four of that chapter reads as follows: *For I will cast out the nations before thee and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land when thou shalt go up to appear at the face of the Lord thy God three times in a year* (Ex. 34:24). It is curious that this passage should follow immediately after the other discussion of the *face of God*, especially in the light of its relation to death, since sacrifice also contains the notion of death. Apparently, the vision which Moses had been denied in the earlier part of the chapter has become the communal property of all Israel, at least in some highly mitigated form. Since the verse connects this vision with the security of Israel's borders it would seem to go beyond the notion of the inner unity of the people which the yearly sacrifices were intended to promote. Here again *the face of God* seems to be connected with the establishment of tradition in the double sense of unifying the community itself and radically distinguishing it from others which may lay claim to natural kinship.

The face of God will be mentioned once more in the Torah. At the death of Moses the author writes: *And no prophet in Israel has yet arisen like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face* (Deut. 34:10). Apparently, what had been stated in Ex. 33:20 has proven to be true. Moses seems to have had a vision of *the face of God* only at his death.

Some moderns poke fun at Goethe for having suggested that Moses committed suicide. Their argument rests on the notion that, from the point of view of modern psychology, Moses was a stable man. That is undoubtedly true if one wishes to be overly kind to the perceptions of modern psychology. What Moses and Goethe may have seen, even though it has escaped the modern commentators, were the problems which we indicated in the commentary to Gen. 20:7 concerning the stature of Moses. Nothing could have been possible had he not almost become a god. Everything would have failed if he had achieved that state. His death scene reads as follows:

So Moses the servant of the Lord died in the land of Moab according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the land of Moab over against Beth Peor but no man knoweth of his sepulchre to this day. And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eye was not dim nor was his strength abated. (Deut. 34:5-7)

Had Moses died one day in front of the people and his grave been known, he would either have lost his position or apotheosis would have been inevitable (see commentary to Gen. 49:5). This is surely the insight of Goethe and may very well have been shared by Moses.

The face of God had been alluded to early in the Book of Genesis. After he is told to become a wanderer Cain complains to God and says: *From Thy face I shall be hid* (Gen. 4:14). From the very beginning *the face of God* had been connected with death.

In the commentary to Gen. 19:21 there was a lengthy discussion of the significance of the term *to lift the face*. At that point the discussion mainly turned around the concept of *lifting*. The term seemed to contain one of the major threads which holds our story together. It is the process by which the beginnings of things slowly become molded to fit the needs and abilities of man. If it is the face that is *lifted* it would seem that the face represents the pure beginnings on which the edifice stands.

32. AND AS HE PASSED OVER PENUEL THE SUN ROSE UPON HIM, AND HE HALTED UPON HIS THIGH.
33. THEREFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL EAT NOT OF THE SINEW OF THE HIP MUSCLE WHICH IS UPON THE HOLLOW OF THE THIGH UNTO THIS DAY: BECAUSE HE TOUCHED THE HOLLOW OF JACOB'S THIGH ON THE SINEW OF THE HIP MUSCLE.

The word which is translated *hip muscle* commonly has that meaning in other Semitic languages, but this is the only passage in the Bible in which it has this meaning. It normally means *forgetfulness*. The passage may be related to Noah's drunken stupor, in which we all participated. Before it was possible for the new world to arise, all recollection of the antediluvian world was eradicated in Noah's drugged sleep. Similarly, Jacob's vision of *the face of God* had to be erased before the New Way could arise. However, when that step was made, something vital seems also to have been lost. The New Way seems to be the most proper way for men, even though there may be in it a bit of a limp.

CHAPTER XXXIII

1. AND JACOB LIFTED UP HIS EYES, AND LOOKED AND, BEHOLD, ESAU CAME. AND WITH HIM FOUR HUNDRED MEN. AND HE DIVIDED THE CHILDREN UNTO LEAH, AND UNTO RACHEL, AND UNTO THE TWO HANDMAIDS.

The sight of Esau's four hundred men is both reassuring and disturbing. The four hundred men, like the four hundred years in Egypt, the forty days which Noah spent on the Ark, the forty days which Moses spent on the mountain, and many more instances, signify a period of waiting. We can be certain that Jacob will be safe, but we cannot be sure that that safety will last forever. During the remainder of the chapter we shall be forced to consider later times.

2. AND HE PUT THE HANDMAIDS AND THEIR CHILDREN FOREMOST, AND LEAH AND HER CHILDREN AFTER, AND RACHEL AND JOSEPH HINDERMOST.
3. AND HE PASSED OVER BEFORE THEM. AND BOWED HIMSELF TO THE GROUND SEVEN TIMES, UNTIL HE CAME NEAR TO HIS BROTHER.

4. AND ESAU RAN TO MEET HIM, AND EMBRACED HIM, AND FELL ON HIS NECK, AND KISSED HIM: AND THEY WEPT.

The reason for the order in which Jacob placed his family has been debated for millennia. The handmaids and their children obviously come first to protect the others from Esau's men in case there should be trouble. The problem is whether Rachel is last because it is the safest place or whether Leah is put in the middle because it is the safest place. The problem is somewhat important because Jacob's character depends to a certain extent upon which of his wives he prefers. The present commentator does not know the answer to the question involved.

Jacob led the party not knowing how his brother would greet him. This hero seems almost to abase himself in order to avoid what the four hundred men imply to be the inevitable. Everything was done to escape conflict between him and his brother on this land where so often brothers will kill brothers.

Esau ran to greet his brother in a manner that reminds us of Abraham on the day he ran to greet the three strangers that were standing by his tent. Esau embraced Jacob, fell upon his neck, kissed him, and the two began to weep. Tears, and particularly the tears of joy, will reappear in the story of Joseph, where they will emerge as the highest form of passion in the book (Gen. 45:1).

5. AND HE LIFTED UP HIS EYES AND SAW THE WOMEN AND THE CHILDREN;
AND SAID, WHO ARE THOSE YOU'VE GOT THERE? AND HE SAID, THEY ARE
THE CHILDREN WITH WHICH GOD HAS GRACED THY SERVANT.

6. THEN THE HANDMAIDENS CAME NEAR, THEY AND THEIR CHILDREN,
AND THEY BOWED THEMSELVES.

7. AND LEAH ALSO WITH HER CHILDREN CAME NEAR, AND BOWED THEM-
SELVES; AND AFTER CAME JOSEPH NEAR AND RACHEL, AND THEY BOWED
THEMSELVES.

8. AND HE SAID: WHO ARE ALL THIS CAMP THAT YOU'VE GOT THERE WHICH
I MET UP WITH, AND HE SAID, THESE ARE TO FIND GRACE IN THE SIGHT
OF MY LORD.

9. AND ESAU SAID: I'VE GOT PLENTY, BROTHER, KEEP WHATCHA HAVE FER
YOURSELF

10. AND JACOB SAID: NAY, I PRAY THEE. IF NOW I HAVE FOUND GRACE
IN THY SIGHT, THEN RECEIVE THE PRESENT AT MY HAND: FOR THEREFORE I
HAVE SEEN THY FACE, AS THOUGH I HAD SEEN THE FACE OF GOD, AND
THOU WAST PLEASED WITH ME.

Esau, friendly and a bit seedy, has finally arrived. His language is simple and direct, and one can almost hear a twang in it. Jacob is still unsure of his ground, and his cold formality seems largely unintelligible. If, as was suggested in the commentary to Gen. 25:22, Esau is a stray mixture of the way of Jacob

and the way of Ishmael, he clearly presents himself at this point as the best that that mixture could provide. He is simple, rough, and loveable. It still remains to be seen, however, what other forms that mixture can take.

Jacob, in contrast to Esau, speaks in a very formal dialect. The contrast is striking since such formal language is rarely, if ever, found in the book.

The only difficulty that remains is to understand the phrase *I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me*. Hebrew is a loosely-constructed language, and the relations between phrases must often be gathered from the context. The tense systems are not as sophisticated as in English, and part of the beauty of the language lies in its ability to suggest relations rather than to spell them out. In the context, it is possible to translate *I had seen thy face, as though, looking at the face of God, but thou wast pleased with me*; however, some moderns translate the phrase: *For to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably*. In the light of the discussion in the commentary to Gen. 32:31 the use of the word *but* may make more sense out of the passage. As we saw there *the face of God* seemed more related to Jacob's fears than to the brother which he in fact discovered.

11. TAKE, I PRAY THEE, MY BLESSING THAT IS BROUGHT TO THEE; BECAUSE GOD HATH DEALT GRACIOUSLY WITH ME, AND BECAUSE I HAVE ENOUGH. AND HE URGED HIM, AND HE TOOK IT.

In Verse Eleven Jacob beseeches Esau to accept his *blessing*. The *blessing* in this case is the cattle which Esau had originally refused. The two of them had not seen each other since Jacob had stolen his brother's blessing. Esau may have feared that the blessing was a material blessing. Jacob thought it necessary then to leave his father's house empty-handed in order to assure Esau that he would not lose anything in that sense. Thinking that Esau may have considered a certain risk to have been involved Jacob wishes to compensate his brother by returning the *blessing*.

12. AND HE SAID, LET US TAKE OUR JOURNEY, AND LET US GO, AND I WILL GO BEFORE THEE.

13. AND HE SAID UNTO HIM, MY LORD KNOWETH THAT THE CHILDREN ARE TENDER, AND THE FLOCKS AND HERDS WITH YOUNG ARE WITH ME: AND IF MEN SHOULD OVERDRIVE THEM ONE DAY, ALL THE FLOCK WILL DIE.

14. LET MY LORD, I PRAY THEE, PASS OVER BEFORE HIS SERVANT: AND I WILL LEAD ON SOFTLY, ACCORDING AS THE CATTLE THAT GOETH BEFORE ME AND THE CHILDREN BE ABLE TO ENDURE, UNTIL I COME UNTO MY LORD UNTO SEIR.

15. AND ESAU SAID, LET ME NOW LEAVE WITH THEE SOME OF THE FOLK

THAT ARE WITH ME. AND HE SAID, WHAT NEEDETH IT? LET ME FIND GRACE
IN THE SIGHT OF MY LORD.

16. SO ESAU RETURNED THAT DAY ON HIS WAY UNTO SEIR.

In the light of Esau's friendliness, Professor Von Rad in his commentary to Verse Four in which Esau kisses Jacob makes the following remark: *The unfortunate disfiguration of the scene by the late Jewish Midrash, which changed the words "He Kissed Him" to "He Bit Him," completely misses the narrator's conception.* In his discussion on the present verses, Von Rad says *One sees, however, how little confidence Jacob has in his turn of affairs for the good by his stubborn refusal to Esau's friendly offer to accompany him.*³ Perhaps it will be possible for us to grasp the intention of the *Midrash* with a bit more accuracy than did Professor Von Rad.

In Verse Twelve Esau extends an invitation to his brother to come and visit the land of Seir. Apparently during Jacob's absence his brother Esau had been able to establish a homeland for his half of the sons of Isaac. This homeland was mentioned once again by Joshua near the end of his life when he sketched for the people the history of their journey.

2. And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the river in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. 3. And I took your father Abraham from the other side of the river, and led him throughout all the land of Canaan, and multiplied his seed, and gave him Isaac. 4. And I gave unto Isaac Jacob and Esau: and I gave unto Esau Mount Seir, to possess it; but Jacob and his children went down unto Egypt. 5. I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out. 6. And I brought your fathers out of Egypt: and ye came unto the sea; and the Egyptians pursued after your fathers with chariots and horsemen unto the Red Sea. 7. And when they cried unto the Lord, He put darkness between you and the Egyptians, and brought the sea upon them and covered them; and your eyes have seen what I have done in Egypt: and ye dwelt in the wilderness a long season. 8. And I brought you into the land of the Amorites, which dwelt on the other side Jordan; and they fought with you: and I gave them into your hand, that ye might possess their land: and I destroyed them from before you. 9. Then Balak the son of Zippor, King of Moab, arose and warred against Israel, and sent and called Balaam the son of Beor to curse you: 10. But I would not hearken unto Balaam; therefore he blessed you still: so I delivered you out of his hand. (Josh. 24:2-10)

Jacob feels that this is not the proper time to visit his brother and gives his reasons in Verse Fourteen. The word which is translated *cattle* by King James rarely if ever has that meaning. Its primary significance is *work*, in the sense of *craftsmanship* or, more generally, something which must be accomplished. It often has the significance of *the object of labor*, and hence, *pos-*

3. Von Rad, *op. cit.*, pp. 322-23.

session. But a more obvious translation for Verse Fourteen would read: *at the pace of my work and at the pace of the children.*

Jacob's children are still young, and he must defer his visit for a while. Joshua's speech to the people seems to say that the sons of Isaac were divided into two peoples: one was sent into Egypt, where they suffered for four hundred years but grew into a nation; the other was established immediately in the land of Seir. On their return from Egypt, Israel, *according to the pace of their work and at the pace of the children*, finally arrived in the land of Seir, which had been established in order that they might have free passage to the new land. But at that time passage was denied them (Num. 20:14–23). Now it had been long established that the land of the Edomites should be the borders of Israel (Num. 34:3), and it was under no circumstances to belong to Israel, because it belonged to *their brother, Esau* (Deut. 2:5). After Edom's denial, Moses decided to take the longer route through the land of their other brothers, the Moabites. This longer route was the main cause for the dissatisfaction of the people, who became disheartened over the long journey (Num. 21:4). Ultimately, it led to the necessity of capturing the land of the Amorites, east of the Jordan river, and destroyed the dream of a unified people, living as a whole within a well-defined area. This history is repeated by Jephthah at the outbreak of his war against the Amorites. The passage reads as follows:

And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: but when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh; then Israel sent messengers unto the King of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the King of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the King of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent unto Sihon King of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. (Judg. 11:15–21)

The Hebrew word for *bite* is close to the word for *kiss*, and by playing with the two words the Rabbis were trying to indicate a strange kind of unity within the tale of Esau. As that tale develops we will see that the unity of opposites which the Rabbis imply captures the strange status that the Edomites have in the book extremely well.

It is lamentable that Professor Von Rad was unable to see the full significance of *the back of God*. To speak less metaphorically he did not fully under-

stand the Biblical notion of the importance that tradition plays in our lives whether we are aware of it or not. The lack of the notion of nature in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense within the Bible means that much of our thought and many of our actions depend radically upon the thoughts around us. God seems to be the guarantor that good traditions will last longer than bad traditions on a wide scale, but that bad traditions can also take hold of us and that it is difficult to shake them off. If this were not the case, good traditions too would have little chance of catching hold. The things that are in the air in our childhood can influence us beyond our awareness if we do not consider them carefully. Had he understood this concept of *the back of God* Professor Von Rad may have judged the statement of the Rabbis differently.

17. AND JACOB JOURNEYED TO SUCCOTH, AND BUILT HIM AN HOUSE, AND MADE BOOTHS FOR HIS CATTLE: THEREFORE THE NAME OF THE PLACE IS CALLED SUCCOTH.
18. AND JACOB CAME PEACEFULLY TO THE CITY OF SHECHEM, WHICH IS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, WHEN HE CAME FROM PADAN-ARAM; AND PITCHED HIS TENT BEFORE THE CITY.
19. AND HE BOUGHT A PARCEL OF A FIELD, WHERE HE HAD SPREAD HIS TENT, AT THE HAND OF THE CHILDREN OF HAMOR, SHECHEM'S FATHER, FOR AN HUNDRED PIECES OF MONEY.
20. AND HE ERECTED THERE AN ALTAR, AND CALLED IT EL-ELOHE-ISRAEL.

And Gideon came to Jordan, and passed over, he, and the three hundred men that were with him, faint, yet pursuing them. And he said unto the men of Succoth, Give, I pray you, loaves of bread unto the people that follow me; for they be faint, and I am pursuing after Zebah and Zalmunna, kings of Midian. And the princes of Succoth said, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hand, that we should give bread unto thine army? And Gideon said, Therefore when the Lord hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers. And he went up thence to Penuel, and spake unto them likewise: and the men of Penuel answered him as the men of Succoth had answered him. And he spake also unto the men of Penuel, saying, When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower. Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, and their hosts with them, about fifteen thousand men, all that were left of all the hosts of the children of the east: for there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword. And Gideon went up by the way of them that dwelt in tents on the east of Nobah and Jogbehah, and smote the host: for the host was secure. And when Zebah and Zalmunna fled, he pursued after them and took the two kings of Midian, Zebah and Zalmunna, and discomfited all the host. And Gideon the son of Joash returned from battle before the sun was up, and caught a young man of the men of Succoth, and enquired of him: and he described unto him the princes of Succoth, and the elders thereof, even threescore and seventeen men. And he came unto the men of Succoth, and said, Behold Zebah and Zalmunna, with whom ye did upbraid me, saying, Are the hands of Zebah and Zalmunna now in thine hands,

that we should give bread unto thy men that are weary? And he took the elders of the city, and thorns of the wilderness and briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth. And he beat down the tower of Penuel, and slew the men of the city.
(Judg. 8:4–17)

This story, which was related in the commentary to Gen. 32:30, has one very strange aspect. It is in a way doubled. Gideon went to two different cities asking each for help and was turned away by both in exactly the same words. In that context it is difficult to see why the story should be told twice. The other city involved is Succoth. The present chapter ends by talking about the city of Succoth just as the former chapter ended by talking about Penuel, but Penuel and Succoth say the same things. Nothing has truly been accomplished in the present chapter. The problems which Jacob faced when Esau approached with his four hundred men will necessarily be faced once more four hundred years later.

After the meeting with his brother, Jacob decided to become the first follower of the New Way to build a house. Earlier in the book we saw a difference between Lot, who depended upon doors and houses, and Abraham, who lived in a tent with merely an opening. The open tent showed a willingness to live together with the whole instead of the need to establish one's own. The original founder of cities, and hence of houses, was Cain. Now that Jacob believes himself to have avoided the fate of Cain he feels that he can build a house securely without endangering his brother.

CHAPTER XXXIV

I. AND DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF LEAH, WHICH SHE BARE UNTO JACOB, WENT OUT TO SEE THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND.

Dinah had begun to settle down in her new home and went out to look at the other girls of the city. We are not told why, but presumably she wanted to see the local customs of dress and language, perhaps in order to know how to dress and comport herself.

2. AND WHEN SHECHEM THE SON OF HAMOR THE HIVITE, PRINCE OF THE COUNTRY, SAW HER, HE TOOK HER, AND LAY WITH HER, AND DEFILED HER.

The Hivites were descendants of Canaan, but their name was notably lacking in Abram's dream (Gen. 15:20). Nonetheless, their name will appear along with the others in the very first list of lands to be conquered given in the Book of Exodus. If their lands were not part of the original promise then the following chapter may make their ultimate fate intelligible to us.

The city of Shechem has a rather interesting history. It was here that Abraham built the first altar when he returned from Egypt (Gen. 12:6), and it was here that Joshua read the law to the people for the last time before his death as Moses had commanded (Deut. 11:30 and Josh. 24:1ff). The rest of its history will emerge in the comments to the remaining verses of the chapter.

3. AND HIS SOUL CLAVE UNTO DINAH THE DAUGHTER OF JACOB, AND HE LOVED THE DAMSEL, AND SPAKE KINDLY UNTO THE DAMSEL.
4. AND SHECHEM SPAKE UNTO HIS FATHER HAMOR, SAYING, GET ME THIS DAMSEL TO WIFE.

In trying to interpret what happens in Chapter Thirty-four we must always bear in mind that Shechem is in love with Dinah. Otherwise, the answers will be too simple. We will not have faced the real problem and hence we will have learned nothing.

5. AND JACOB HEARD THAT HE HAD DEFILED DINAH HIS DAUGHTER: NOW HIS SONS WERE WITH HIS CATTLE IN THE FIELD; AND JACOB HELD HIS PEACE UNTIL THEY WERE COME.

Jacob, who dealt successfully with his brother when facing the problems of the earlier generation, decided not to intervene in the present affair. The relation between Israel and its neighbors once a house had been built became the problems of another generation. Therefore he remained silent and waited for Dinah's brothers to arrive.

6. AND HAMOR THE FATHER OF SHECHEM WENT OUT UNTO JACOB TO COMMUNE WITH HIM.

Hamor and Shechem decided to handle the problem in a more formal way on the level of the older generation.

7. AND THE SONS OF JACOB CAME OUT OF THE FIELD WHEN THEY HEARD IT: AND THE MEN WERE GRIEVED, AND THEY WERE VERY WROTH, BECAUSE HE HAD WROUGHT FOLLY IN ISRAEL IN LYING WITH JACOB'S DAUGHTER; WHICH THING IS NOT DONE.

Jacob's sons accused Shechem of having done a deed *which thing is not done*. Those are the same grounds which Abimelech used in his accusations against Abraham (Gen. 20:9). Such an appeal presupposes some measure of human conduct available to all men whether they live under divine law or not. At the same time the words *because he had wrought folly in Israel* seem to point forward to the laws concerning rape and adultery given in Deut. 22:20–30.

In this verse the word *Israel* is used for the first time as the name of a

people. The attack on Dinah seems to have been the occasion which pulled together the sons of Jacob into a whole nation. In this sense, it is similar to the crimes of the men of Gibeah and Saul's hewing of the oxen (see commentary to Gen. 22:6).

Professor Von Rad is surprised at Jacob's passive role in the present chapter,⁴ but Verse Seven appears to show the reasons for Jacob's passivity. He is in fact taking this opportunity to allow the second generation to come together.

Within this context it may be of some interest to consider the kind of difficulty which has arisen in modern times because of the notion that modern science is the paradigm of intelligibility. On this foundation there arose a peculiar conclusion. Biblical interpreters began with the clear Aristotelian notion that that which can be known with absolute certainty is the mundane. They have turned it about into the assumption that the mundane is the true. A rather good example of this appears when men attempt to distinguish the sources behind the stories told in the Bible. Von Rad argues that Verse Six interrupts the flow between Verses Five and Seven. It must, therefore, be either a gloss or the shreds of a second account thoughtlessly left in by the redactor.

There is no reason to assume, however, that the author wished his story to flow in the manner in which Professor Von Rad would like. When the brothers returned they found Hamor and their father conversing. If the verse is dropped, Hamor's appearance in Verse Seven would be less intelligible, and the force of the final words of Verse Five would be lost. While this explanation may, from a certain point of view, be less mundane than Professor Von Rad's, it seems more in keeping with the dramatic force of the passage.

8. AND HAMOR COMMUNED WITH THEM, SAYING, THE SOUL OF MY SON SHECHEM LONGETH FOR YOUR DAUGHTER; I PRAY YOU GIVE HER HIM TO WIFE.
9. AND MAKE YE MARRIAGES WITH US, AND GIVE YOUR DAUGHTERS UNTO US, AND TAKE OUR DAUGHTERS UNTO YOU.
10. AND YE SHALL DWELL WITH US: AND THE LAND SHALL BE BEFORE YOU: DWELL AND TRADE YE THEREIN, AND GET YOUR POSSESSIONS THEREIN.

Hamor, the father, proposed more than the marriage between Dinah and Shechem. His proposal is that the tribe of Israel and the tribe of the Hivites be merged into a single whole.

Four hundred years later, after Joshua and his men had conquered the cities of Jericho and Ai, many of the Hivites from Gibeon, having heard of the conquest, decided that it would be wiser to capitulate than to fight. They put on old clothes, took some dry, moldy provisions and a bit of wine in a ragged sheepskin, and went to visit Joshua in the city of Gilgal. Claiming to be from

4. *Op. cit.*, p. 228.

a distant land these men again proposed signing a covenant between the Hivites and the Children of Israel. Joshua accepted the offer, and though the covenant had been arranged under false pretenses he felt bound to abide by its terms, but made them serve as *hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God* (see Josh. 9:23).

The only city as a whole that was allowed to remain with all its inhabitants after the conquest was Gibeon (Josh. 11:17). Five of the Canaanite kings, in retaliation for what seemed to them a betrayal, then decided to attack the Hivites in Gibeon, who sent to Joshua for help. Joshua and his men arrived from Gilgal and were able to defeat the Five Kings, who were fighting under the leadership of Adonai-Zedec, king of Jerusalem (Josh. 10:3). Joshua, however, was not able to capture the city itself; this conquest was to wait till the time of David.

The country was divided. Some followed David, but some were still loyal to the House of King Saul and rallied around Abner. These troubles came to an end when Joab killed Abner after the war games that had taken place at Gibeon, where Joab returned, after Absalom's revolt, to kill Amassa (II Sam. 21:1).

The three-year famine which occurred near the end of the reign of King David was explained by the Lord as being a punishment for crimes which Saul had committed against the Gibeonites, in retribution for which members of Saul's house (II Sam. 21:4) were condemned to death.

In general the lower, but perhaps necessary face of politics which contributed to the rise of the kingdom and its stability centered itself around the Hivite city of Gibeon. Interestingly enough, it is also the place where God appeared to King Solomon and answered his request for the possession of political wisdom (I Kings 3:8).

By all that can be gathered from Chapter Nine of the Book of Judges, the city of Shechem also continued to have many Hivite inhabitants, and therein, too, lies a tale.

The Book of Judges can be divided into two parts, Chapter One through Chapter Sixteen, and Chapter Seventeen through Chapter Twenty-one. The first sixteen chapters present life under the Judges as a continuous cycle. The people are constantly falling into the ways of their neighbors, some punishment is brought in the form of an attack from the outside, and a hero arises for a time to save the country. But after his death the cycle begins all over again. This was the period of Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah. It closes with the private hero, Samson, who fights his own war against the Philistines.

These cycles also lasted about four hundred years. One must remember that, as in the years of the kings, the last year under one ruler was also the first year of the next. Therefore, one year must be subtracted from each before they can be summed.

<i>Foreign ruler</i>	<i>Judge</i>	<i>Years in power</i>	<i>Years to be counted</i>	<i>Ref. in Judges</i>
Chushan		8	7	3:8
	Othniel	40	39	3:11
Moab		18	17	3:14
	Ehud	80	79	3:30
Hazor		20	19	4:3
	Deborah	40	39	5:31
Midian		7	6	6:1
	Gideon	40	39	8:28
	Abimelech*	3	2	9:22
	Tola	23	22	10:2
Philistine & Amon	Jair	22	21	10:3
		18	17	10:8
	Jephthah	6	5	12:7
	Ibzan	7	6	12:9
	Elon	10	9	12:11
	Abdon	8	7	12:14
Philistines		40	39	13:1
	Samson	20	19	15:20
TOTAL			393	

*Abimelech is somewhat in a class by himself since he can neither be called a judge nor a foreign ruler.

It should be noted that if the law of subtraction does not apply to the foreign rulers then the period involved would be precisely four hundred years.

After the death of Samson the author introduces a phrase for which he has carefully prepared the reader by these endless struggles. Chapter Seventeen concerns the story of Micah and his establishment of the private altar which played such an important role in the fall of the Jubilee Year. At this point the author introduces the phrase with which the book as a whole will conclude: *because there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (Judg. 17:6). This part of the book culminates with the final story of the book, in which the tribe of Benjamin was almost destroyed and the innocent men of Shiloh were all killed by the feeble attempts of the crowd to establish their twisted notions of justice. The cycles in the earlier part of the book were intended by the author to show the pointlessness of life under the Judges and the urgent need for a king. In the latter half of the book he is more explicit about the solution.

The author, however, is under no delusion that kingship is a perfect solution. In his mind the loosely-connected system under the Judges would have been preferable if it had been possible. This facet of his thought is made clear after the death of Gideon.

Near the end of his life Gideon was offered kingship by the people, and

though he rejected the offer it whet the appetite of his son, Abimelech, whom Gideon had by a concubine from the city of Shechem. In the context it becomes reasonably clear that Shechem was still inhabited by the Hivites. Abimelech convinced the men of Shechem to crown him king by arguing that, if he were not made king, they would be ruled by the *three-score and ten* sons of Gideon, and he also reminds them that he was *your bone and your flesh* (Judg. 9:2). Presumably, Abimelech considered himself and the men of Shechem as being from another people not related to the sons of Abraham. In other words the concubine and the men of Shechem appeared to have remained Hivites.

Upon taking the kingship, Abimelech succeeded in killing all of the sons of Gideon, except one, whose name was Jotham. Jotham then went up to the top of Mount Gerizim, the mountain of curses, which was by Shechem, and told the parable of the trees.

And when they told it to Jotham, he went and stood in the top of Mount Gerizim, and lifted up his voice, and cried, and said unto them, Hearken unto me, ye men of Shechem that God may hearken unto you. The trees went forth on a time to anoint a king over them; and they said unto the olive tree, Reign thou over us. But the olive tree said unto them, Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? And the trees said to the fig tree, Come thou, and reign over us. But the fig tree said unto them, Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said the trees unto the vine, Come thou, and reign over us. And the vine said unto them, should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees? Then said all the trees unto the bramble, Come thou, and reign over us. And the bramble said unto the trees, If in truth ye anoint me king over you, then come and put your trust in my shadow: and if not, let fire come out of the bramble, and devour the cedars of Lebanon. Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely, in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; for my father fought for you, and adventured his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midi-an: and ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons, upon one stone, and have made A-bimelech, the son of his maidservant, king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother; if ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Je-rubba-al and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in A-bime-lech, and let him also rejoice in you: but if not, let fire come out from A-bime-lech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour A-bime-lech. And Jotham ran away, and fled, and went to Beer, and dwelt there, for fear of A-bime-lech his brother. (Judg. 9:7–21)

This parable seems to argue that in a well-running state each good man has his own proper function within the whole. The unity of the whole can only be preserved if each man contributes his particular excellence. Therefore, the only possible king is a man who has no excellence. This, from the highest point of view, is the author's argument against kingship.

The author then plays upon the feelings of the reader in a most marvelous way. Abimelech is attacked by another pretender whose name is Gaal. As the battle is going on the reader tends to forget Abimelech's past deeds and almost accepts him as a hero in the light of Gaal's attack. But after the attack is over, the author is quick to remind us who our hero Abimelech really is. By this device the author forces us into the same chaotic confusion into which the desire for a king had led the men of Shechem. It seems, however, to be the author's view that at such a point only the rise of a proper king can put an end to such chaos.

The tenuousness of this solution becomes evident when we remember that the great split in the kingdom came about when Jeroboam became king, also in the city of Shechem.

11. AND SHECHEM SAID UNTO HER FATHER AND UNTO HER BRETHREN, LET ME FIND GRACE IN YOUR EYES AND WHAT YE SHALL SAY UNTO ME I WILL GIVE.
12. ASK ME NEVER SO MUCH DOWRY AND GIFT, AND I WILL GIVE ACCORDING AS YE SHALL SAY UNTO ME: BUT GIVE ME THE DAMSEL TO WIFE.
13. AND THE SONS OF JACOB ANSWERED SHECHEM AND HAMOR HIS FATHER DECEITFULLY, AND SAID, BECAUSE HE HAD DEFILED DINAH THEIR SISTER:
14. AND THEY SAID UNTO THEM, WE CANNOT DO THIS THING, TO GIVE OUR SISTER TO ONE THAT IS UNCIRCUMCISED: FOR THAT WERE A REPROACH UNTO US:
15. BUT IN THIS WILL WE CONSENT UNTO YOU: IF YE WILL BE AS WE BE, THAT EVERY MALE OF YOU BE CIRCUMCISED:

Seeing that Jacob has decided to let the younger generation control the situation, Shechem at this point takes over the discussion from his father, Hamor.

During their forty-year journey, the Jews did not practice circumcision. After they crossed the Jordan, Joshua's first act was to circumcise all of the men. This took place in the city of Gilgal, the same city in which the Hivites signed their false covenant with Israel (Josh. 5:1,10 and 9:6).

In the commentary to Gen. 17:6 we discussed the notion of circumcision and tried to see its relation to the Covenant. It signified a division between the unprepared chaotic world about us and the order which can be established in the small realm included within the Covenant. This was true both at the time of Noah and at the time of Abraham. Circumcision in the Book of Exodus is understood to be a necessary prerequisite for partaking in the Passover celebration. It is that which allows for the possibility of freedom within the ordered fragment of all that is. During their nomadic life in the Sinai desert the Israelites, though they had the Law, had as yet no place in which they were confined. Since there was no border distinguishing them from the outside there was no circumcision. They were rather like the blessed fish.

As soon as the people crossed the river Jordan the manna on which they

had fed for forty years ceased. Joshua circumcised the men, and they began to eat of the fruit of the land in the city of Gilgal.

Samuel first crowned Saul king privately. At that time he sent Saul to visit the prophets and told him to go to the city of Gilgal to begin the never-ending war against the Philistines. He was told that before the war there would be a sacrifice but that he should wait until Samuel came to participate (I Sam. 10:8).

Saul was then crowned publicly in the city of Gilgal (I Sam. 11:14), but when the time for the war arrived he did not wait for Samuel but performed the sacrifice himself. At this time Saul was told that his line would not continue (I Sam. 13:14).

The Hivites at Shechem and at Gibeon; Saul and Gilgal; Abimelech and Abner; Amassa and circumcision! The lower, but perhaps necessary, face of politics continually peered from among the Hivites. Kingship is thus in a way confused or intermingled with circumcision because it is a lower alternative as a means of distinguishing between political order and political chaos. The present story of the Hivites is a foreshadowing of their attempt to join that political order four hundred years later at the time of Joshua. It is also a reminder that they were the first to substitute a king for the Covenant during the reign of Abimelech.

Dinah's brothers accused Shechem of *defiling* her. We must try to understand what that accusation means. The main source of the laws concerning *defilement* is the Book of Leviticus. We should begin by listing the kinds of things which can defile a person by touch: *the body of a dead animal* (Lev. 5:2); *that which comes out of man* (Lev. 5:3); *the running of any sore* (Lev. 15:1–16); *male sperm* (Lev. 15:16–18); and *Menstrual Fluid* (Lev. 15:19–33). Defilement is also caused by a leper (Lev. Chap. 13). In all of these cases anyone who touches the object or who comes in contact with someone who had thus been defiled has himself become defiled. He must wash, and he remains in the state of defilement until evening, when he must bring a sacrifice. In the case of birth the defilement period is much longer:

And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, if a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised. And she shall then continue in the blood of her purifying three and thirty days; she shall touch no hallowed thing, nor come into the sanctuary, until the days of her purifying be fulfilled. But if she bear a maid child, then she shall be unclean two weeks, as in her separation: and she shall continue in the blood of her purifying threescore and six days. (Lev. 12:1–5)

Defilement may also be caused by adultery or sodomy (Lev. 18:20–23).

Another source of defilement is the eating of creeping things and animals other than those which have a split hoof and chew a cud (Deut. 14:6). The

reason given for this is: *For thou art a holy people unto the Lord thy God who has chosen thee to be a treasured people unto Himself above all the Nations on the earth* (Deut. 14:2). People who have been defiled may neither enter the sanctuary nor partake in the Passover service, though another meal is held one month later for those who could not participate (Num. 9:11).

The examples first mentioned remind one of what has been said about *foreskins* (see commentary to Gen. 17:6). At that time we saw that the world came into being in an incomplete state; either something was missing or there was something extra that had to be cut off. There is something very similar in the notion of *defilement*. Creatures living according to their normal way excrete beyond themselves in many ways. Life is impossible otherwise. Most of the sources of defilement have their origin in the inability of the body to remain within its own confines. Something extra or superfluous is always being formed. Presumably dead bodies are also the source of defilement because they should, by all rights, disappear at the time of death, or at least return to the *dust from which it was taken*. Even the world itself contains many animals which do not quite fit into their proper categories and are hence unfit for a *holy people*.

Since political freedom is understood as being radically distinguished from the freedom of the *wild ass*, which is more at home in the freely flowing world, no one who has been so defiled may partake of the Passover meal. It is a celebration of freedom in the political sense. The law appears to be necessary because it is often difficult to distinguish the two kinds of freedom.

In the eyes of the brothers, and most particularly in the eyes of Levi, the marriage between Shechem and Dinah, and hence the unification of the Chosen People with the Hivites, is a defilement because it threatens the major plan of beginning in a small but concentrated way. Apparently the concept of defilement is another expression of the cosmological foundations for the necessity of beginning life under law in a small way with the hopes that it will grow after it has been established.

16. THEN WILL WE GIVE OUR DAUGHTERS UNTO YOU, AND WE WILL TAKE YOUR DAUGHTERS TO US, AND WE WILL DWELL WITH YOU, AND WE WILL BECOME ONE PEOPLE.
17. BUT IF YE WILL NOT HEARKEN UNTO US, TO BE CIRCUMCISED: THEN WILL WE TAKE OUR DAUGHTER, AND WE WILL BE GONE.
18. AND THEIR WORDS PLEASED HAMOR, AND SHECHEM HAMOR'S SON.
19. AND THE YOUNG MAN DEFERRED NOT TO DO THE THING, BECAUSE HE HAD DELIGHT IN JACOB'S DAUGHTER: AND HE WAS MORE HONORABLE THAN ALL THE HOUSE OF HIS FATHER.
20. AND HAMOR AND SHECHEM HIS SON CAME UNTO THE GATE OF THEIR CITY, AND COMMUNED WITH THE MEN OF THEIR CITY, SAYING,
21. THESE MEN ARE PEACEABLE WITH US; THEREFORE LET THEM DWELL

IN THE LAND, AND TRADE THEREIN; FOR THE LAND, BEHOLD, IT IS LARGE ENOUGH FOR THEM; LET US TAKE THEIR DAUGHTERS TO US FOR WIVES, AND LET US GIVE THEM OUR DAUGHTERS.

22. ONLY HEREIN WILL THE MEN CONSENT UNTO US FOR TO DWELL WITH US. TO BE ONE PEOPLE, IF EVERY MALE AMONG US BE CIRCUMCISED, AS THEY ARE CIRCUMCISED

23. SHALL NOT THEIR CATTLE AND THEIR SUBSTANCE AND EVERY BEAST OF THEIRS BE OURS? ONLY LET US CONSENT UNTO THEM, AND THEY WILL DWELL WITH US.

Hamor and Shechem have decided to accept the arrangements proposed by Jacob's sons. Verse Twenty-one, in which Hamor sees that the men have come in peace, is a reference to Verse Eighteen of the last chapter. At least for the moment Jacob was convinced by his encounter with Esau that he could settle peacefully on the land without any wars.

Hamor's speech to the men of his city indicates that he would expect Hivite customs to prevail, and long after they are gone Hamor and Shechem will have their way. The Hivites in Shechem, followers of Abimelech, the son of Gideon, will be the first to introduce kingship into Israel. The personal covenant of circumcision linking each man with his fellow which was sufficient in the early time of the Judges will be replaced by a political covenant. Each man's duty from that point forward will be to the king and not to his nearest neighbor.

24. AND UNTO HAMOR AND UNTO SHECHEM HIS SON HEARKENED ALL THAT WENT OUT OF THE GATE OF HIS CITY; AND EVERY MALE WAS CIRCUMCISED, ALL THAT WENT OUT OF THE GATE OF HIS CITY.

25. AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE THIRD DAY, WHEN THEY WERE SORE, THAT TWO OF THE SONS OF JACOB, SIMEON AND LEVI DINAH'S BROTHERS, TOOK EACH MAN HIS SWORD AND CAME UPON THE CITY BOLDLY, AND SLEW ALL THE MALES.

26. AND THEY SLEW HAMOR AND SHECHEM HIS SON WITH THE EDGE OF THE SWORD, AND TOOK DINAH OUT OF SHECHEM'S HOUSE, AND WENT OUT.

It may be that Simeon and Levi were serious in Verse Seventeen when they said they would leave if the Hivites were unwilling to accept the proposal. They may have been more concerned about the deeper problems of defilement in the sense of defiling the New Way. We have already seen the grounds of their fears when discussing the role the Hivites played in the growth of kingship and its attempt to replace the covenant. The two-sided character of the insight which Simeon and Levi demonstrate will be discussed in the commentary to Gen. 49:5.

The Levites as a class first rose to significance immediately following the episode of the Golden Calf:

Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, Whoever is on the Lord's side, let him come to me, and all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together. And he said unto them, thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (Ex. 32:26-27)

The virtue/vice of zeal can already be seen in Levi here in the present chapter from Genesis, and a more complete picture of Levi and Simeon will be given in the commentary to Gen. 49:5.

27. THE SONS OF JACOB CAME UPON THE SLAIN, AND SPOILED THE CITY, BECAUSE THEY HAD DEFILED THEIR SISTER.
 28. THEY TOOK THEIR SHEEP. AND THEIR OXEN, AND THEIR ASSES, AND THAT WHICH WAS IN THE CITY, AND THAT WHICH WAS IN THE FIELD.
 29. AND ALL THEIR WEALTH, AND ALL THEIR LITTLE ONES, AND THEIR WIVES TOOK THEY CAPTIVE, AND SPOILED EVEN ALL THAT WAS IN THE HOUSE.

While the other brothers did not take part in the massacre, they were quick to enjoy the spoils. The full story of the dangers which lie ahead for the New Way became clear to Jacob as he quietly watched his sons. Zeal for the New Way in the light of foreign opposition will lead to a war, and the availability of conquered foreign goods will tempt them from the way. This is the great danger which we have seen ever since Chapter Fourteen.

30. AND JACOB SAID TO SIMEON AND LEVI, YE HAVE TROUBLED ME TO MAKE ME TO STINK AMONG THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND, AMONG THE CANAANITES AND THE PERIZZITES: AND I BEING FEW IN NUMBER THEY SHALL GATHER THEMSELVES TOGETHER AGAINST ME, AND SLAY ME: AND I SHALL BE DESTROYED, I AND MY HOUSE.

At this point we see Jacob's reflections on what he has seen. He is *troubled*. The word for *troubled* is not a very common one. It appears four times in the books with which we have been dealing, and the passages all reflect in one way or another the difficulties which Jacob has just become aware of.

After the battle of Jericho, Joshua commanded the people not to take spoils. The verse reads as follows: *And ye in any wise keep yourselves from the accursed things lest ye make accursed when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse and trouble it* (Josh. 6:18). Joshua was disturbed that the men would be more attracted by the ways of the conquered things than by the New Way which they were to establish (see commentary to Gen. 14:1).

The word *trouble* appears for a second time in the same general context.

After the battle of Jericho, Joshua and his men attacked the city of Ai but suffered a great defeat. This defeat was caused by a man named Achan who had been attracted by a Babylonian garment which he found in the conquered city. After the cause of the defeat had been discovered the text reads as follows: *And Joshua said, Why hast thou troubled us? The Lord shall trouble thee this day. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and burnt them with fire, after they had stoned them with stones* (Josh. 7:25).

Before going out onto his first battle against the Philistines, Saul gave his men the following order: *Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening so that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food* (I Sam. 14:24). His son Jonathan did not hear the command because he had sneaked into the camp of the enemy where he was doing single combat. During the battle he found a honeycomb and dipped his hand into it. The text continues:

And put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. Then answered one of the people and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint. Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found? For had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? They smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon: and the people were very faint. And the people flew upon the spoil, and took sheep, and oxen, and calves, and slew them on the ground: and the people did eat them with the blood.
(I Sam. 14:27-32)

After the battle Saul made an oath that he would kill the man who had eaten even if it were his own son, but when the people discovered the circumstances they refused to have Jonathan killed. These two passages, one from the Book of Joshua and the other from the First Book of Samuel, present both sides of the argument, and in both cases the word *troubled* is used (Josh. 6:18, 7:25, and I Sam. 14:28). Any leader is placed on a very thin line in the middle. When and how much of the spoil should be given is a very difficult matter which can only be solved, if at all, by the most astute of leaders. The attraction which Achan felt for Babylonian things became the symbol of corruption. And yet the enlightenment which Jonathan received from Philistine honey in Verse Twenty-seven reminds one of the wisdom which David received.

The word *troubled* also appears in the Book of Judges where Jephthah did the very opposite. Before going into battle against the Ammonites he swore that if he won the battle he would consecrate the first thing that came out of his door upon his return. The first one to greet him after the war was his young daughter, and the text says that Jephthah was *troubled*. Apart from these instances the word *troubled* never appears in any of the twelve books.

Jacob, who had left his brother full of hope, now sees no possibility for the establishment of the land. By joining in the Covenant, the Hivites had become one of the brothers. The war, chaos, and fratricide which Jacob had hoped to avoid had already begun.

In this chapter we can see the simple and forthright way in which our author can see the whole of man. Levi's zeal for the New Way has led to a horrible act, but where is the author who has faced the true greatness of America without forgetting about men like Sitting Bull and Black Elk? Some see the black and senseless destruction of the Crusades, some its glory. To see the highest is almost as common as to see the lowest. But to see them both, not one today and one tomorrow, but as they happen, all mixed together, not letting the one blind the eyes to the other, that is rare and a sign of greatness.

31. AND THEY SAID, SHOULD HE DEAL WITH OUR SISTER AS WITH AN HARLOT?

Harlotry in the Bible is constantly used as a metaphor for leaving the New Way. The sons remind Jacob of the alternative.