

# interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

May 1983

Volume 11 Number 2

- |     |                        |   |
|-----|------------------------|---|
| 139 | Arlene W. Saxonhouse   | An Unspoken Theme in Plato's <i>Gorgias</i> : War                             |
| 171 | Mary Pollingue Nichols | The Good Life, Slavery, and Acquisition: Aristotle's Introduction to Politics |
| 185 | Catherine Zuckert      | Aristotle on the Limits and Satisfactions of Political Life                   |
| 207 | Timothy Fuller         | Temporal Royalties and Virtue's Airy Voice in <i>The Tempest</i>              |
| 225 | Jeffrey Barnouw        | The Pursuit of Happiness in Jefferson, and its Background in Bacon and Hobbes |
| 249 | Robert Sacks           | The Lion and the Ass: a Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 35–37)    |

# interpretation

Volume 11 number 2

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz  
• Howard B. White (d.1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula •  
Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis  
Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d.1973) • Kenneth W.  
Thompson

Associate Editors Larry Arnhart • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo  
• Maureen Feder • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela  
Jensen • Will Morrisey • Bradford Wilson

Assistant Editors Marianne C. Grey • Laurette G. Hupman

Design & Production Martyn Hitchcock

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in  
INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA  
Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies  
of their work. All manuscripts and editorial correspon-  
dence should be addressed to INTERPRETATION,  
Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Copyright 1983 • Interpretation

# The Lion and the Ass:

## A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 35–37)

ROBERT SACKS

*St. John's College, Annapolis and Santa Fe*

### CHAPTER XXXV

- I. AND GOD SAID UNTO JACOB, ARISE, GO UP TO BETH-EL, AND DWELL THERE:  
AND MAKE THERE AN ALTAR UNTO GOD, THAT APPEARED UNTO THEE WHEN  
THOU FLEDDEST FROM THE FACE OF ESAU THY BROTHER.

What he learned in the city of Shechem forced Jacob to return to Beth-el, the scene of his dream. It now appears to him as though life under the conditions announced in the dream will not be possible. By virtue of their circumcision the Hivites had become followers of the New Way, and their murder constituted the fratricide which Jacob had hoped to avoid. Jacob is forced to return to the scene of the former dream hoping that God would make the message of the first dream more explicit.

2. THEN JACOB SAID UNTO HIS HOUSEHOLD, AND TO ALL THAT WERE WITH  
HIM, PUT AWAY THE STRANGE GODS THAT ARE AMONG YOU, AND BE CLEAN,  
AND CHANGE YOUR GARMENTS:

Jacob begins his journey back to Beth-el by having his house put away their strange gods and cleanse themselves. It may be that he suspected Rachel of being in possession of Laban's gods and surely was aware of the relationship between that difficulty and the trouble which he saw in Chapter Thirty-four.

Cleansing, which is the antidote for defilement as discussed in the commentary to Gen. 34:11, is accomplished in a combination of at least three ways—water, time, and sacrifice. One of the fundamental ways of cleansing appears in the following verse: *And upon whatsoever any of them, when they are dead, doth fall, it shall be unclean; whether it be any vessel of wood, or raiment, or skin, or sack, whatsoever vessel it be, wherein any work is done, it must be put into water, and it shall be unclean until the even; so it shall be cleansed* (Lev. 11:32). Cleansing is done by washing in water as in the days of the Flood. Only water, in its kinship to chaos, is sufficient to carry away with it everything which is superfluous. The object itself, however, is not considered clean until evening, that strange moment when distinctions become less real. Evening, which had arisen by itself as an uncreated mixture of the light and the darkness and had been considered the beginning of the world's inability

to remain within clear confines, now, precisely because of its undefined character, provides for the possibility of a change in character.

We had our first glimpse of the double role that water is capable of playing when we were considering the Philistines and their relation to David in the commentary to Gen. 23:1. Those men, lately come from the sea, taught David respect for the Ark as well as the art of war. We shall return to the double significance of water in the commentary to Gen. 49:10 by considering the lions which stood at the base of the great lavabo that held the waters of ablution in front of Solomon's Temple.

Often things cannot be cleansed immediately and time is required: *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. 12:5).

Cleansing is the opposite of defilement, which we discussed in the commentary to Gen. 34:11. In the Book of Exodus it is used over and over again to describe the *pure gold* which was used to make the utensils for the Tent of Meeting and the Ark itself (see Ex. Chapters 22 and 28). In this context the word *pure* means refined by fire until all of the dross has been removed (see Mal. 3:3). The gold used for the Ark is intentionally not gold in its natural state. Purified gold had to be used in making the Ark because gold as found in nature is a mixture and hence not adequate for man. Partly for these reasons and partly because of most men's reaction to that world of mixtures, especially during the time of sacrifice, a sharp line must be drawn between that world and the artful world in which sacrifice becomes possible.

Defilement in itself is never considered sinful. It is part of the world and must be lived with. The greatest sin, however, is to confuse the two realms by partaking in the sacrificial meal while in a state of defilement. For such an act there is no cleansing: there is only banishment (see Lev. 7:21).

3. AND LET US ARISE, AND GO UP TO BETH-EL; AND I WILL MAKE THERE AN ALTAR UNTO GOD, WHO ANSWERED ME IN THE DAY OF MY DISTRESS, AND WAS WITH ME IN THE WAY WHICH I WENT.

Jacob will now return to the God who *was with me in the way which I went*. Jacob's manner of describing God at this point is somewhat curious. It seems almost to indicate that God has been following man. Up to now Jacob has followed the path which lay ahead of him and God has come along. That way led to the city of Shechem and the difficulties which Jacob met there.

4. AND THEY GAVE UNTO JACOB ALL THE STRANGE GODS WHICH WERE IN THEIR HAND, AND ALL THEIR EARRINGS WHICH WERE IN THEIR EARS; AND JACOB HID THEM UNDER THE OAK WHICH WAS BY SHECHEM.

Before returning to Beth-el Jacob purifies his house by burying their *strange gods*. There appears to be a reference here to Chapter Thirty-one. Jacob, at

least at this point, suspects that Laban's gods were indeed stolen by one of his household. He buried these gods together with the earrings of which we will speak in a moment under *the oak which was by Shechem*.

The use of the definite article is peculiar and seems to indicate the existence of a particular and famous oak near Shechem, and indeed there was such an oak. Dramatically speaking it was a very old oak which lasted throughout most of Israel's history. Following its history in many of the English translations of the Bible is, however, sometimes confusing because the word for *oak* is often translated *plain*.

So far as one can tell *the oak* under which Jacob buried the strange gods was the oak of Moreh where Abram built his first altar to the Lord after he left Haran. *And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Shechem and to the oak of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land* (Gen. 12:6). Moses uses the oak of Moreh as a signpost when he gives the people directions to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebel (Deut. 11:3), and it was under this tree that Joshua wrote and set up *the Book of the Lord* (Josh. 24:24). In spite of all of these noble enterprises the foreign gods which lay buried under this tree finally came to the surface. Abimelech, the son of Gideon, whose story was told in the commentary to Gen. 34:11, was crowned king *by the oak of the pillar that was in Shechem* (Judg. 9:6). The oak becomes even more significant when one remembers that immediately after the crowning of King Abimelech, Jotham gave his famous parable of the trees, which is perhaps the most theological argument against kingship in the Bible (Judg. 9:7-15; see also the commentary to Gen. 34:11).

Earrings also play a seesaw role in the development of the Bible. The gold from earrings was used by Aaron to build the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:2), but it was also used by Bezaleel to build the Ark (Ex. 35:22). The last time they are mentioned is in connection with the Ephod which Gideon made after he had refused the kingship. The Ephod is then referred to as a thing which *became a snare unto Gideon and unto his house* (Judg. 8:27). It may have collected enough of the people into one group to have made Abimelech's kingship possible, and its power among the people certainly gave force to Abimelech's contention that if he were not made king the sons of Gideon would take power (Judg. 9:2). In a slightly larger context Gideon's private Ephod may have set a precedent for the private Ephod of Micah which played such an important part in the decline of the Jubilee Year. It led to the first private worship away from the people, who were to have all gathered together at the House of the Lord (see commentary to Gen. 15:17).

5. AND THEY JOURNEYED: AND THE TERROR OF GOD WAS UPON THE CITIES THAT WERE ROUND ABOUT THEM, AND THEY DID NOT PURSUE AFTER THE SONS OF JACOB.
6. SO JACOB CAME TO LUZ, WHICH IS IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, THAT IS, BETH-EL, HE AND ALL THE PEOPLE THAT WERE WITH HIM.

7. AND HE BUILT THERE AN ALTAR, AND CALLED THE PLACE EL-BETH-EL: BECAUSE THERE GOD APPEARED UNTO HIM, WHEN HE FLED FROM THE FACE OF HIS BROTHER.

This time Jacob has a safe journey, but he returns to Beth-el to where he *fled from the face of his brother*. In spite of God's protection, Jacob is still confused because he sees no way of fulfilling the divine plan of establishing a well-ordered society upon a just foundation.

8. BUT DEBORAH, REBEKAH'S NURSE DIED, AND SHE WAS BURIED BENEATH BETH-EL UNDER THE OAK: AND THE NAME OF IT WAS CALLED ALLON-BACHUTH.

Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, was buried beneath another famous oak. The author again speaks of *the oak*, as if it were an oak that we should recognize. In order to understand this verse it will be necessary to remind ourselves of Rebekah's character. She was the good woman who quietly cared for blind old Isaac most of his life and saw to it that the blessing was carried through Isaac and delivered safely into the hands of Jacob, even though Isaac was not fully aware of what he had done. The woman buried under the *oak* in Beth-el was even more removed from the divine plan than Rebekah. She was the woman who cared for Rebekah herself when she was a very young child. *The oak* at Beth-el lived for a long time. It was *the oak* under which the *man of God* was found by the Prophet after his encounter with King Jeroboam. This was the young man who predicted the coming of King Josiah three hundred nineteen years too early (see commentary to Gen. 20:7).

When the lion and the ass guarded the body of the *young man of God* under this oak they were guarding a promise which would not be fulfilled for many years to come. The same long-range care is symbolized by the nurse. This oak stands in opposition to the oak at Shechem which concealed the gods that came to light in the days of Abimelech, the son of Gideon. But the oak at Beth-el lasted much longer than the oak at Shechem and its promise was fulfilled by King Josiah.

Time, and the way in which it can conceal and reveal, preserve and destroy, is part of the answer to Jacob's fears and doubts.

The oak is called in Hebrew Allon-bachuth, the oak of tears. The significance of this name will be discussed in the commentary to Gen. 45:14.

9. AND GOD APPEARED UNTO JACOB AGAIN, WHEN HE CAME OUT OF PADAN-ARAM, AND BLESSED HIM.  
 10. AND GOD SAID UNTO HIM, THY NAME IS JACOB: THY NAME SHALL NOT BE CALLED ANY MORE JACOB, BUT ISRAEL SHALL BE THY NAME: AND HE CALLED HIS NAME ISRAEL.  
 11. AND GOD SAID UNTO HIM, I AM GOD ALMIGHTY: BE FRUITFUL AND MUL-

TIPLY; A NATION AND A COMPANY OF NATIONS SHALL BE OF THEE. AND KINGS SHALL COME OUT OF THY LOINS;

12. AND THE LAND WHICH I GAVE ABRAHAM AND ISAAC, TO THEE I WILL GIVE IT, AND TO THY SEED AFTER THEE WILL I GIVE THE LAND.

The silent God has finally spoken again, and yet one may also say that He has not spoken. Jacob had already achieved the name Israel after his wrestling match (Gen. 32:28). He knew very well that he had been sent by God Almighty and that he would become *a company of nations* (Gen. 28:3). The land had been promised to him and to his fathers many times (Gen. 28:13), and he himself had already understood that he would be the father of kings (Gen. 28:18 and commentary). Apparently, there is nothing new in the words of God. Apparently, God is still silent.

13. AND GOD WENT UP FROM HIM IN THE PLACE WHERE HE TALKED WITH HIM.

14. AND JACOB SET UP A PILLAR IN THE PLACE WHERE HE TALKED WITH HIM, EVEN A PILLAR OF STONE: AND HE Poured A DRINK OFFERING THEREON, AND HE Poured OIL THEREON.

15. AND JACOB CALLED THE NAME OF THE PLACE WHERE GOD SPAKE WITH HIM BETH-EL.

The history of *pillars* and the role it plays in the development of the people is a fascinating and curious subject. Jacob was the first great builder of pillars. He built the first one at Beth-el after waking from his dream. (Gen. 28:18, 22) and even mentions it once to his wives (Gen. 31:13). He built another one as a permanent memory of his agreement with Laban (Gen. 31:45–52), and he will build two in the present chapter—one to commemorate the present moment and one to commemorate the death of Rachel.

Moses also built a pillar at the time he invited the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, to share his vision, and we remember well the disastrous effects of that moment (see Ex. 24:9 and commentary to Gen. 15:9). That was the last legitimate pillar ever raised in the New Way. One chapter earlier Moses had already commanded the people to smash the pillars which were dedicated to other gods when they enter into the new land (Ex. 23:24). In Leviticus they are commanded not to build any pillars (Lev. 26:1); and in the Book of Deuteronomy they are told not only to burn the existing pillars with fire but they are specifically told not to build any to God because their worship should be limited to *the place which I shall choose* (Deut. 12:3–5), the phrase which became so important for us in the commentary to Gen. 15:9. The text even goes so far as to say the Lord *hates* pillars (Deut. 16:22).

The first illegitimate pillar was built by Absalom in self-commemoration (II Sam. 18:18), and immediately after Jeroboam's revolution there were pillars built *on every high hill, and under every green tree* (I Kings 14:23).

Under the influence of his wife, Jezebel, Ahab became a great builder of pillars to Baal (II Kings 3:2). In that sense they became the counterpart in the southern kingdom to the altar which Jeroboam built at Beth-el in the northern kingdom. Although Jehu and Hezekiah began the work of tearing them down (II Kings 10:27 and 18:4), their final destruction came in the reign of Josiah, one verse prior to the highest point in the book when he destroyed the altar at Beth-el, long the symbol of a divided nation (II Kings 23:14).

Perhaps the best way of understanding the radical change in the Biblical attitude toward pillars is to consider the present text more deeply by comparing it with Jacob's last journey to Beth-el (Gen. 28:18). On that occasion he poured oil on the pillar, symbolizing his awareness that there would be another day in which the formalities and rigor of kingship and priesthood would come to his people. This time he adds a libation of wine.

Up until this point Jacob had forgotten the wine. In other words the one thing Jacob had forgotten is *forgetting* itself (see commentaries to Gen. 9:21, 22, and 19:31). Understanding the verse in this way begins to reveal the full meaning of Verse Eight in which Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. Jacob had forgotten that ideas can sleep while life continues. Man's ability to forget and to remember is the means which will allow the New Way to be established in spite of the fears which Jacob felt at the end of Chapter Thirty-four. There are times when men must fight their brothers, and while scars of those battles will never completely disappear, the battles themselves will be forgotten and life will once more be possible.

For reasons which will become evident, it is proper that something should be said at this point about what moderns might call our *method* of reading the Bible. It is difficult to speak of a method in the sense of a tool with which we come to the book, other than the notion that one should begin by assuming that a book is written with intelligence until the opposite is shown. Nonetheless it is clear that a certain way has developed. It began in the days of Abraham when by chance we noticed that the places in which he built altars became important in later times. Following the indication that the Bible wished to be read in such a manner, we tried to recall everything that happened in a given place or to a given group of men whenever their names appeared, and in general a story evolved. In one sense our task was made easy because of the modern invention of the concordance. In another sense we have seriously failed to participate in the Bible when we used that book.

If we had not had the concordance, reading the Bible would have been a slow process of remembering and forgetting which would have duplicated life as the author understood it. The author's way is not merely a literary device. It duplicates his understanding of men and their ways. Men live by traditions which bury themselves deep into the land only to arise from time to time for good or for bad. At times they are forgotten and then suddenly reappear on the surface. The Bible is not only an attempt to lay the roots of a tradition;



it is also a dramatic showing-forth of how such traditions are possible, but one cannot see that presentation without, at least in some sense, participating in it.

16. AND THEY JOURNEYED FROM BETH-EL; AND THERE WAS BUT A LITTLE WAY TO COME TO EPHRATH; AND RACHEL TRAVAILED, AND SHE HAD HARD LABOUR.

17. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN SHE WAS IN HARD LABOUR, THAT THE MIDWIFE SAID UNTO HER, FEAR NOT: THOU SHALT HAVE THIS SON ALSO.

18. AND IT CAME TO PASS, AS HER SOUL WAS IN DEPARTING, (FOR SHE DIED) THAT SHE CALLED HIS NAME BEN-ONI: BUT HIS FATHER CALLED HIM BENJAMIN.

The son which she had asked for has finally come, but Rachel, even on her death bed, cannot rejoice in birth; the name she gave to her son means *the son of my sorrow*. This time Jacob can no longer accept Rachel's way and re-names the child *the son of my right hand*.

19. AND RACHEL DIED, AND WAS BURIED IN THE WAY TO EPHRATH, WHICH IS BETHLEHEM.

20. AND JACOB SET A PILLAR UPON HER GRAVE THAT IS THE PILLAR OF RACHEL'S GRAVE UNTO THIS DAY.

21. AND ISRAEL JOURNEYED, AND SPREAD HIS TENT BEYOND THE TOWER OF EDAR.

22. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN ISRAEL DWELT IN THAT LAND, THAT REUBEN WENT AND LAY WITH BILHAH HIS FATHER'S CONCUBINE: AND ISRAEL HEARD IT. NOW THE SONS OF JACOB WERE TWELVE:

Now that Rachel is dead Reuben sleeps with her handmaid, Bilhah. He assumes that at the death of Rachel the connection between his father and Bilhah became even less than it had been previously. One might call this relationship an extremely mild case of incest. For the full story of Reuben see the commentary to Gen. 49:3.

23. THE SONS OF LEAH; REUBEN, JACOB'S FIRSTBORN, AND SIMEON, AND LEVI, AND JUDAH, AND ISSACHAR, AND ZEBULUN:

24. THE SONS OF RACHEL: JOSEPH, AND BENJAMIN:

25. AND THE SONS OF BILHAH, RACHEL'S HANDMAID; DAN, AND NAPHTALI:

26. AND THE SONS OF ZILPAH, LEAH'S HANDMAID; GAD AND ASHER: THESE ARE THE SONS OF JACOB, WHICH WERE BORN TO HIM IN PADAN-ARAM.

27. AND JACOB CAME UNTO ISAAC HIS FATHER UNTO MAMRE, UNTO THE CITY OF ARBAH, WHICH IS HEBRON, WHERE ABRAHAM AND ISAAC SOJOURNED.

So old Isaac is still alive. It has been many years since we have seen him, and by now most of us had either forgotten him or thought that he was dead.

This is the third time death has come to a major character in the book. The first major character to die was Sarah; she died at the age of 127 years (Gen. 23:1), seven years longer than the life that was granted to man after the Flood (Gen. 6:3). Strangely enough Isaac was sixty years old at the birth of Jacob, which would mean that his life after the birth of Jacob was precisely 120 years. In a more complicated way the same thing is true of Abraham. He died at the age of 175 (Gen. 25:1). Now Isaac was born when Abraham was 99, and Sarah died when Isaac was 40 (Gen. 25:20). If one allows one year for mourning, that would mean that Abraham was 140 when he married Keturah, or that he lived with Keturah for 35 years. Now Ishmael was born when Abraham was 86, and therefore we may presume that he was conceived when Abraham was 85. In the commentary to Gen. 25:1 we showed that Abraham had two lives—one which he led as a private man and the other which he led as the founder of the New Way. If one presupposes that his private life lasted from his birth to the conception of Ishmael and was resumed again when he married Keturah, the length of that life was 85 years plus 35 years or exactly 120 years, the length of life which God prescribed to man.

There are interesting differences in the two cases which completely reflect the characters of Abraham and Isaac. The part of Abraham's life which was devoted to the New Way lasted until he had seen his son safely married. It included the care he took in preserving the Way. Isaac's private life began at the birth of his son. Once he had passed on the seed his work was essentially over. Abraham's private life was full and rich; it produced many great nations and would have commanded our respect even if he had not been chosen to establish the New Way, but Isaac would have remained unknown.

Moses died at the age of 120; in his case there was no distinction between the two lives.

28. AND THE DAYS OF ISAAC WERE AN HUNDRED AND FOUR-SCORE YEARS.

29. AND ISAAC EXPIRED, AND DIED, AND WAS GATHERED UNTO HIS PEOPLE,

BEING OLD AND FULL OF DAYS: AND HIS SONS ESAU AND JACOB BURIED HIM.

As in the case of Abraham, Isaac is buried by both of his sons. Again his death seems to be private and detached from the New Way (see Gen. 25:9).

## CHAPTER XXXVI

1. NOW THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ESAU, WHO IS EDM.

2. ESAU TOOK HIS WIVES OF THE DAUGHTERS OF CANAAN; ADAH THE DAUGHTER OF ELON THE HITTITE, AND AHOLIBAMAH THE DAUGHTER OF ANAH THE DAUGHTER OF ZIBEON THE HIVITE;

3. AND BASHMATH ISHMAEL'S DAUGHTER, SISTER OF NEBAJOTH.

Chapter Thirty-six, the chapter dealing with the descendants of Esau, is by far the most artless chapter of the entire book and perhaps the most artless chapter in the whole of the Bible. Hittites will become Hivites, women will suddenly become men, names will appear from nowhere like rabbits out of hats, and brothers who almost have identical names will suddenly become one. There are two reasons for this artlessness. First, the author, as it were, presents the history of Esau as if it had been preserved by his own children. In doing so he reproduces the artless character of Esau himself. There is no long tradition concerning Ishmael. The way of the *wild ass* is not a way that keeps records. But Esau, as a strange mixture between the New Way and the wild ass, does keep records. However, they tend to get scrambled a bit.

The other reason is more complicated. By his apparent artlessness the author reveals the nature of his own art. These chapters are a reasonable facsimile of traditions as they come down through the people and may not be so unlike the mass of material which must have faced our author himself.

The problem immediately presents itself in these first verses. Esau had married three women. The first was Judith the daughter of Beerli, the Hittite; the second Bashemath the daughter of Elon the Hittite (Gen. 26:34); and the third was Mahalath the daughter of Ishmael (Gen. 28:9). Suddenly, Judith's name becomes Adah who is now considered the daughter of Elon the Hittite, who had been the father of Bashemath. Bashemath, in the meantime, has become Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite. And Mahalath's name has become Bashemath, just to round things off. To make things even more difficult Anah will turn out to be male and a descendant of Seir, rather than being a Hivite who was supposed to have been a Hittite. We shall see more of this three-ring circus as we go along.

4. AND ADAH BARE TO ESAU ELIPHAZ; AND BASHEMATH BARE REUEL;
5. AND AHOLIBAMAH BARE JEUSH, AND JAALAM, AND KORAH: THESE ARE THE SONS OF ESAU, WHICH WERE BORN UNTO HIM IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.
6. AND ESAU TOOK HIS WIVES, AND HIS SONS, AND HIS DAUGHTERS, AND ALL THE PERSONS OF HIS HOUSE, AND HIS CATTLE, AND ALL HIS BEASTS, AND ALL HIS SUBSTANCE WHICH HE HAD GOT IN THE LAND OF CANAAN; AND WENT INTO THE COUNTRY FROM THE FACE OF HIS BROTHER JACOB.
7. FOR THEIR RICHES WERE MORE THAN THAT THEY MIGHT DWELL TOGETHER; AND THE LAND WHEREIN THEY WERE STRANGERS COULD NOT BEAR THEM BECAUSE OF THEIR CATTLE.

There seems to be some question about the time of Esau's migration to Seir since in the earlier chapter he appears to have occupied that country before Jacob's return.

8. THUS DWELT ESAU IN MOUNT SEIR: ESAU IS EDOM.
9. AND THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF ESAU THE FATHER OF THE EDOMITES IN MOUNT SEIR:

10. THESE ARE THE NAMES OF ESAU'S SONS; ELIPHAZ THE SON OF ADAH  
THE WIFE OF ESAU, REUEL THE SON OF BASHEMATH THE WIFE OF ESAU.  
11. AND THE SONS OF ELIPHAZ WERE TEMAN, OMAR, ZEPHO, AND GATAM,  
AND KENAZ.

Eliphaz's first-born son, Teman, is mentioned as the father of the tribe to which that other Eliphaz from the Book of Job belongs (Job 2:11), but none of the other sons mentioned in Verse Eleven ever appears in the books with which we have been dealing except for Kenaz.

We may not take the direct route to understanding this verse, but like the Children of Israel, who feared the giants and were forced to take the longer route which lasted forty years, we, too, must make a long excursion. Our forty-year journey also begins in the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Numbers with the list of spies who were sent out to view the new land. Let us consider them individually.

The tribe of Reuben sent Shammua the son of Zaccur whose grandfather is unknown. The tribes of Simeon sent Shaphat the son of Hori. The tribe of Judah sent Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Issachar sent Igal the son of Joseph, whose grandfather is also unknown. Ephraim sent the famous Joshua, son of Nun, but even his grandfather is unknown. There is little sense in going through the rest of the list. In only one case can the geneology of the spies be traced back beyond the second generation. This is a very peculiar circumstance to find in a book which relies so heavily on tradition and which so often underlines the importance of family trees. The fact that this is even true of Joshua makes matters most strange indeed.

At this point we must make a second detour to understand something about the character of Joshua. Soon after the Israelites had escaped Pharaoh's army, they were attacked by the Amalekites. At that point the son of Nun suddenly appeared in the text for the first time and became the leader of the army in battle (Ex. 17:9-14).

Little was heard of him again until Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, had that strange and somewhat vulgarized vision of God which played such a role in the formation of the great gap between Moses and the people. It was then that Joshua was chosen to accompany Moses, and from that time on he stood on the other side of the gap together with Moses (Ex. 33:11). It was he who first told Moses the significance of the cries that were coming from the camp during the affair of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:17), and he again warned Moses when Eldad and Midad were prophesying in the middle of the camp. Before becoming the successor to Moses his great virtue seems to have been his sensitivity to the dangers of wildness.

Aside from Joshua, Caleb was the only spy who was convinced that the Children of Israel had the prowess and stamina to face the giants. When they returned, the other spies described the beauties of the land and the horrors of

the giants. But Caleb said: *Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to possess it* (Num. 13:30). Nonetheless the people became frightened and revolted. It was at that time that the Lord decreed that the Children of Israel would be forced to wander forty years in the desert because they were not yet able to face the giants. Only Caleb, *the servant of God*, together with Joshua, was allowed to live through that journey to see the promise fulfilled (Num. 24:22–25).

As we mentioned at the beginning of this digression nothing is known about the fathers of any of the spies with the exception of Jephunneh, the father of Caleb. Jephunneh was a Kenizzite (Num. 32:12) and hence a direct descendant of the fifth son of Eliphaz, the son of Esau, just as Caleb's son-in-law, Othniel, the first of the Judges, was himself a Kenizzite (Josh. 15:17 and Judg. 3:9).

This rather shocking turn of affairs makes a certain amount of sense in the light of the second chapter of Deuteronomy, in which it is pointed out that while Israel suffered in slavery for four hundred years in Egypt, Esau was able to conquer the land of the Horims who seem either to be giants or at least to be in close contact with giants (see Deut. 2:12, 21–23). In Caleb the son of Jephunneh, a direct descendant of Esau, we see one side of Esau's character. Esau has the stamina and prowess which Israel lacked, but in the next commentary we shall meet another descendant and see another side of that character.

12. AND TIMNA WAS CONCUBINE TO ELIPHAZ ESAU'S SON; AND SHE BARE TO ELIPHAZ AMALEK: THESE WERE THE SONS OF ADAH ESAU'S WIFE.

Eliphaz had another son by a concubine named Timna, but the general subject of concubines will be discussed in the following chapter. Our present problem is to discuss Israel's relationship to that other son, Amalek.

The country of Amalek was first mentioned as having been captured by Chedorlaomer in Chapter Fourteen during the time that he was fighting the giants. Amalek, as we know, was not a giant, in spite of the fact that he will often be associated with them. Our task will be to understand that kinship as well as to see what distinguishes them.

After the Children of Israel successfully eluded the army of Pharaoh by crossing the Sea of Reeds they revolted because of starvation. Moses successfully quelled the revolt, and God promised to provide manna for the starving people.

The people then arrived at a place called Raphidim where there was a second revolt, this time over the lack of water. Just about the time water was provided from a rock, the Amalekites attacked from the rear. This was the beginning of a war which was to last for centuries. The Amalekites, being descendants of Esau, were of course much more closely related to Israel than either the Moabites or the Syrians, whom we have mentioned on many occasions.

They were the brothers who were to have welcomed Israel and to have provided them with easy access to the Promised Land so that it would not have been necessary to take the land of the Ammonites. Had this plan worked the Jordan River would have formed the eastern border, and the unity of the people would have been assured. For as we remember, it was simply the largeness of the country which forced the eastern provinces to build the first separate altar.

The Amalekites were to have been one of the first to receive the New Way in fulfillment of the fundamental promise. By being the first people to attack Israel they made it clear that so long as they lived the universal promise would never be fulfilled (Ex. 17:8).

The critical meeting between Moses and Jethro in which it was determined that the New Way should be a way of written law took place in Raphidim immediately after this battle (Ex. 19:2). By relating these two incidents, the author seems to indicate the great difference between the Amalekites and the giants.

The giants are the irrational forces around us whom we can escape by means of borders and covenants but whom we can never conquer. The Amalekites on the other hand are our own brothers.

In their revolt, the Children of Israel showed that the waters of chaos still churned deeply within them. If the firmament is intended to hold back the waters of the universe and borders are to hold back the chaotic waters of the Philistines, these laws were intended to contain the chaotic waters within the hearts of the people. The Amalekites, who were closer in kin than either the Maobites or the Midianites, are like the waters within our souls just as the giants are the waters beyond the expanse. Since they are part of us they cannot be excluded by mere borders.

Their cowardly attack from the rear was the first indication that the original method of spreading the New Way via their nearest of kin would not succeed. The cowardliness of the attack led to God's decision that the Amalekites should be treated as the men who lived before the Flood. His words were as follows: *Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for will I utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven* (Ex. 17:14).

These people next showed up as living among the giants and were seen by the spies who brought back the reports concerning the invincibility of the new land (Num. 13:28,29).

After God rebuked the people for their revolt in the face of the giants, He turned to Caleb and called him *My servant* because he alone would have been able to face the giants. The author takes that opportunity to remind us again that the Amalekites were living among the giants, but we must remind ourselves that Caleb too was a son of Esau.

The following morning the men woke up and saw the Promised Land right over the hill. With a sudden burst of courage they decided to attack imme-

diately without waiting the appointed forty years, but their courage came too late and they were defeated by the Amalekites, who chased them to a city called Horma (Num. 14:40–46).

In the commentary to Gen. 49:5 we shall discuss the strange death of Aaron. That death had a profound effect on the people, and immediately after he died they were able to face the Amalekites and regain the city of Horma. That battle, while it did not mean that Israel had become giant-killers, allowed them to set off with confidence to the land of King Sihon.

In that wonderful but brief period following the death of Joshua when it looked as though the Children of Israel could rule themselves under God without king or leader, Judah and Simeon recaptured Horma with ease.

There were several skirmishes between Israel and the Amalekites during the times of the Judges. The first attack came shortly after the death of Othniel, the Kenizzite. Thus, the same theme has occurred again. The Kenizzites were descendants of Esau. So long as Othniel was alive the Amalekites were no problem. Israel's best protection against the evil side of Esau—the Amalekites—had always been a son of Esau himself, and Othniel the Kenizzite was such a man. There were a few more skirmishes, but in general the situation was quiet until the reign of King Saul.

After Saul's first battle with the Philistines there was another brief battle with the Amalekites, who had apparently taken the opportunity to conquer Israelite land during the Philistine war (I Sam. 14:48), but it was sometime later that the Amalekite wars became serious.

Saul's kingship having been well established, Samuel reminded him of the divine decree against the Amalekites.

Before the battle Saul warned the Kennites, who were at that time living among the Amalekites, to leave so that they would not be injured in the battle. The Kennites, whom we remember from the commentary to Gen. 25:1, were descendants of Hobab, Moses' father-in-law (Judg. 4:11). For the second time the text has made a connection between the Amalekites and Jethro.

Saul was proud of his success in the fields that day, but he spared the life of Agag their king and saved the best of the cattle to present as a sacrifice to God: *And Saul said, They have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed* (I Sam. 15:15). Saul's words of excuse to Samuel are quite moving, but Samuel only answers, *Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams* (I Sam. 15:22). As a result Agag was hacked to pieces by Samuel, and the kingship was taken from the line of Saul.

The sympathetic way in which Saul's position is presented makes it evident that the author is aware that the case of Amalek is a strange affair which must appear monstrous. It only becomes intelligible when we realize that we are not

dealing with history but with a book about the nature of peoples and their ways. Amalek cannot be thought of as a foreign race which is to be wiped out but as an internal counterpart of the external giant. Looked at in that way we can see why there are facets which might tempt even a decent man to preserve what must ultimately be destroyed.

During the early days of his rise to power, David, vassal to King Achish in Ziklag, pretended to his lord that he and his men had attacked Israel. But the truth is that during this period David had begun his conquest of the Amalekites (I Sam. 27:8).

While Saul was fighting his last battle with the Philistines the Amalekites attacked the camp at Ziklag. When David returned he found Ziklag in ashes, all his belongings captured, and his wives taken prisoner. But he was able to defeat the Amalekites, free his wives, and recapture his belongings with only a small band of men.

Although King Saul lost his throne for preserving Amalekite cattle as a sacrifice to the Lord, David took possession of all the Amalekite goods and distributed them equally among all of his men, to those who fought and to those who did not fight. The passage reads as follows:

*And David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David, and to meet the people that were with him: and when David came near to the people, he saluted them. Then answered all the wicked men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart. Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the Lord hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? But as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so, from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day. (I Sam. 30:21–25)*

Among those to receive the spoils were the men of Horma (I Sam. 30:30).

This insistence upon justice is intended as a revision of the simple ban on Amalekite goods which had been placed upon Saul.

As we related in the commentary to Gen. 14:4, Saul was wounded during his last Philistine war and asked his armor bearer to relieve his suffering with his sword, but the armor bearer refused (I Sam. 31:4). Two days later a man appeared at David's camp to report Saul's death. According to his account, Saul asked him to do the same service by holding the sword, and the young man complied. When David discovered that the young man was an Amalekite his reaction was no weaker than Samuel's when he met Agag. As in the earlier occasion the Amalekite youth was portrayed as a decent man. His exact words were as follows:



*He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me. So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord. (II Sam. 1:9–10)*

As in the case of Ishmael, something of value was understood to be closely bound up with the Amalekites and with the Amalekite in the heart of Israel, even though it could not remain. What makes the Bible an interesting book is its awareness of that value. The tradition of the Amalekites lasted for many centuries. Haman, the villain in the Book of Esther, was a descendant of Agag (Esther 3:10), and the hero, Mordecai, was a descendant of Kish, the Benjaminite, the father of King Saul (Esther 2:5).

13. AND THESE ARE THE SONS OF REUEL: NAHATH, AND ZERAH, SHAMMAH, AND MIZZAH: THESE WERE THE SONS OF BASHEMATH ESAU'S WIFE.
14. AND THESE WERE THE SONS OF AHOLIBAMAH, THE DAUGHTER OF AHAH THE DAUGHTER OF ZIBEON, ESAU'S WIFE: AND SHE BARE TO ESAU JEUSH, AND JAALAM, AND KORAH.
15. THESE WERE DUKES OF THE SONS OF ESAU: THE SONS OF ELIPHAZ THE FIRST BORN SON OF ESAU: DUKE TEMAN, DUKE OMAR, DUKE ZEPHO, DUKE KENAZ.
16. DUKE KORAH, DUKE GATAM, AND DUKE AMALEK: THESE ARE THE DUKES THAT CAME OF ELIPHAZ IN THE LAND OF EDOM; THESE WERE THE SONS OF ADAH.

The author goes through this list of the sons of Esau once again in order to show the kind of government they lived under. Apparently, there was no unity among the sons of Esau, who lived in small communities each ruled by its own duke.

This repetition reveals another difficulty within the tradition. If the list of the sons of Eliphaz, the son of Adah, given in Verses Fourteen and Fifteen is compared with the list given in Verse Eleven one can see that Korah, the son of Aholibamah, has suddenly become a son of Eliphaz. This confusion is probably intentional on the part of the author because it reminds us of a similar difficulty in Israel having to do with Korah, the Levite (see Num. 16 and 17, and commentary to Gen. 20:7).

17. AND THESE ARE THE SONS OF REUEL ESAU'S SON: DUKE NAHATH, DUKE ZERAH, DUKE SAMMAH, DUKE MIZZAH: THESE ARE THE DUKES THAT CAME OF REUEL IN THE LAND OF EDOM: THESE ARE THE SONS OF BASHEMATH ESAU'S WIFE.
18. AND THESE ARE THE SONS OF AHOLIBAMAH ESAU'S WIFE: DUKE JEUSH, DUKE JAALAM, DUKE KORAH: THESE WERE THE DUKES THAT CAME OF AHOLIBAMAH THE DAUGHTER OF ANAH, ESAU'S WIFE.

19. THESE ARE THE SONS OF ESAU, WHO IS EDOM, AND THESE ARE THEIR DUKES.

Verse Seventeen is in perfect agreement with Verse Thirteen and Verse Eighteen is in perfect agreement with Verse Fourteen except that it must be remembered that Anah was Aholibamah's mother.

20. THESE ARE THE SONS OF SEIR THE HORITE, WHO INHABITED THE LAND: LOTAN, AND SHO BAL, AND ZIBEON, AND ANAH,

21. AND DISHON, AND EZER, AND DISHAN: THESE ARE THE DUKES OF THE HORITES, THE CHILDREN OF SEIR IN THE LAND OF EDOM.

Zibeon was the grandfather of Esau's wife Aholibamah, but her mother Anah has suddenly become her uncle. It is also peculiar that there should be two brothers named Dishan and Dishon.

22. AND THE CHILDREN OF LOTAN WERE HORI AND HEMAN: AND LOTAN'S SISTER WAS TIMNA.

Lotan's sister, Timna, was the mother of Amalek, at least for the time being.

23. AND THE CHILDREN OF SHO BAL WERE THESE: ALVAN, AND MANAHATH, AND EBAL, SHEPHO, AND ONAM.

24. AND THESE ARE THE CHILDREN OF ZIBEON; BOTH AJAH AND ANAH: THIS WAS THAT ANAH THAT FOUND THE MULES IN THE WILDERNESS, AS HE FED THE ASSES OF ZIBEON HIS FATHER.

25. AND THE CHILDREN OF ANAH WERE THESE: DISHON, AND AHOLIBAMAH THE DAUGHTER OF ANAH.

Ajah may have been the father of Saul's famous concubine, Rizpah, with whom Ishbosheth accused Abner of having slept. This accusation was the immediate cause of Abner's decision to leave Ishbosheth and join the forces of David (II Sam. 3:8 and commentary to Gen. 23:1). Rizpah was also the mother of the sons of Saul whom David hung in order to avoid the famine which was sent because of the deeds which the house of Saul had done against the Gibeonites (II Sam. Chap. 21 and commentary to Gen. 22:6).

Anah, the son of Zibeon, was the mother of Aholibamah, the wife of Esau. Dishon, the son of Anah, was also her brother or his brother as you wish, but as we shall soon see he was two brothers all in one.

26. AND THESE ARE THE CHILDREN OF DISHAN; HEMDAN, AND ESHBAN, AND ITHRAN, AND CHERAN.

27. THE CHILDREN OF EZER ARE THESE; BILHAN, AND ZAAVAN, AND AKAN.

28. THE CHILDREN OF DISHAN ARE THESE; UZ, AND ARAN.

29. THESE ARE THE DUKES THAT CAME OF THE HORITES; DUKE LOTAN, DUKE SHO BAL, DUKE ZIBEON, DUKE ANAH.

Dishon has finally become Dishan and the chaos is complete.

30. DUKE DISHON, DUKE EZER, DUKE DISHAN: THESE ARE THE DUKES THAT CAME OF HORI, AMONG THEIR DUKES IN THE LAND OF SEIR.

After a brief period of unification the brothers have now become two again.

31. AND THESE ARE THE KINGS THAT REIGNED IN THE LAND OF EDMO, BEFORE THERE REIGNED ANY KING OVER THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.
32. AND BELA THE SON OF BEOR REIGNED IN EDMO: AND THE NAME OF HIS CITY WAS DINHABAH.
33. AND BELA DIED, AND JOBAB THE SON OF ZERAH OF BOZRAH REIGNED IN HIS STEAD.
34. AND JOBAB DIED. AND HUSHAM OF THE LAND OF TEMANI REIGNED IN HIS STEAD.
35. AND HUSHAM DIED, AND HADAD THE SON OF BEDAD, WHO SMOTE MEDIUM IN THE FIELD OF MOAB, REIGNED IN HIS STEAD: AND THE NAME OF HIS CITY WAS AVITH.
36. AND HADAD DIED, AND SAMLAH OF MASREKAH REIGNED IN HIS STEAD.
37. AND SAMLAH DIED, AND SAUL OF REHOBOTH BY THE RIVER REIGNED IN HIS STEAD.
38. AND SAUL DIED, AND BAAL-HANAN THE SON OF ACHBOR REIGNED IN HIS STEAD.
39. AND BAAL-HANAN THE SON OF ACHBOR DIED, AND HADAR REIGNED IN HIS STEAD: AND THE NAME OF HIS CITY WAS PAU; AND HIS WIFE'S NAME WAS MEHETABEL, THE DAUGHTER OF MATRED, THE DAUGHTER OF MEZAHAB.

The kings who ruled over Edom turn out to be a potpourri of names found throughout the whole of history. One can find a man named Saul, and Baalam's father is there, as well as the famous king of Syria.

40. AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE DUKES THAT CAME OF ESAU, ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILIES, AFTER THEIR PLACES BY THEIR NAMES: DUKE TIMNA, DUKE ALVAH, DUKE JETHETH.
41. DUKE AHOLIBAMAH, DUKE ELAH, DUKE PINON,
42. DUKE KENAZ, DUKE TEMAN, DUKE MIBZAR,
43. DUKE MAGDIEL, DUKE IRAM: THESE BE THE DUKES OF EDMO, ACCORDING TO THEIR HABITATIONS IN THE LAND OF THEIR POSSESSION: HE IS ESAU THE FATHER OF THE EDMITES.

This list purports to be a summation of the chapter in which the names of the sons of Esau are restated. It contains well known sons such as Kenaz and Teman. However, Timna and Aholibamah have become transvestites, and God only knows where the Dukes Elah, Pinon, Mibzar, and a couple of the others came from.

This comedy of errors concludes the discussion of the sons of Esau. As we stated at the beginning of the chapter, it is intended to show the results of an unweeded garden. Only one thing must be added.

The book of Deuteronomy begins with the following verses:

*These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness, in the plain over against the Red Sea between Paran, and Tophel, and Laban, and Hazeroth, and Dizahab. (There are eleven days' journey from Horeb by the way of mount Seir unto Kadesh-barnea.) (Deut. 1:1,2)*

Scholars have often wished to delete Verse Two, since it makes no sense geographically, not realizing that the author was concerned with more than geography in the simple sense of the word.

Deuteronomy presents itself as an address given by Moses to the people. It is a repetition in speech of the deeds contained in the former books. In that sense it is the beginning of tradition as such. This speech which began the oral tradition in Israel, was delivered *by the way of mount Seir*, the unweeded garden of traditions. One day the author would pick his pen up for the last time. Perhaps he wondered whether the generations to follow would also become lost in the desert and wander into the land of Seir.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

### I. AND JACOB DWELT IN THE LAND WHEREIN HIS FATHER WAS A STRANGER, IN THE LAND OF CANAAN.

On many occasions we have spoken of the *four hundred years* in Egypt. Actually it is not clear from what point one is to begin the count. The relevant passages from Genesis read:

*And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; and also that nation whom they shall serve will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance. And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. (Gen. 15:13-16)*

However it is not possible to reconstruct the time sequence in Egypt. The closest that one can come is arrived at through the following verses:

*And these are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari: and the years of the life of Levi were an hundred thirty and seven years. The sons of Gershon; Libni, and Shimi, according to their families. And the sons of Kohath; Amram, and Izhar, and Hebron, and Uzziel: and the years of the life of Kohath were an hundred thirty and three years. And the sons of Merari; Mahali and Mushi: these are the families of Levi according to their generations.*

*And Amram took him Jochebed his father's sister to wife; and she bare him Aaron and Moses: and the years of the life of Amram were an hundred and thirty and seven years. (Ex. 6:16–20)*

Now since Kohath was born before Levi went to Egypt, it is obvious the four hundred years must have included the time which was spent in Canaan as well.

The word *stranger* or *sojourner* is used here to remind us that Jacob will not be able to spend the whole of his life in the Promised Land.

2. THESE ARE THE GENERATIONS OF JACOB. JOSEPH, BEING SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD, WAS FEEDING THE FLOCK WITH HIS BRETHREN: AND THE LAD WAS WITH THE SONS OF BILHAH, AND WITH THE SONS OF ZILPAH, HIS FATHER'S WIVES: AND JOSEPH BROUGHT UNTO HIS FATHER THEIR EVIL REPORT.

Verse Two is difficult to translate because of the rather subtle use it makes of particles. The two particles involved are *eth* and *be*. The first particle is usually the sign of a direct object but may also mean *with*. The second one usually means *in* or *among*, but may be used to show the direct object of verbs such as *ruling* or *caring for*. The direct object of the verb meaning *to care for a flock* usually requires the particle *eth*. The same two particles appear with the same verb in Verse Twelve, which clearly must be translated: *And his brethren fed his father's flock in Shechem*. For the reader who knows no Hebrew the conclusion of these reflections may be summed up as follows: if the particles are taken in the same sense as they must be taken in Verse Twelve of the present chapter, then Verse Two must be translated: *These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, shepherded his brothers among the sheep though he was a lad, that is the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives*.

The words which are translated *evil report* seem to refer to something which frightened Joseph rather than to something evil. At any rate the only other time the words are used is in the description of the report which the spies brought back regarding the giants (Num. 13:32 and 14:36,37).

3. NOW ISRAEL LOVED JOSEPH MORE THAN ALL HIS CHILDREN, BECAUSE HE WAS THE SON OF HIS OLD AGE: AND HE MADE HIM A COAT OF MANY COLOURS.  
4. AND WHEN HIS BRETHREN SAW THAT THEIR FATHER LOVED HIM MORE THAN ALL HIS BRETHREN, THEY HATED HIM, AND COULD NOT SPEAK PEACEABLY UNTO HIM.

Verses Three and Four contain the kernel of the problem which shall face us for the remainder of the book. After the vision at Beth-el Jacob realized that a solid and well defined order would be necessary in the life of his people. This order would require a preference for the eldest son. At the same time Jacob believed his youngest son to be the most capable, and he was also at-

tracted to Joseph's youth, partly because Jacob himself was the youngest son and partly because of the heroic streak in his character.

The elegant coat which he presented to Joseph seems almost calculated to cause the brothers' anger. It was such a coat that Tamar wore; not the Tamar that we shall meet in the next chapter but David's daughter, who was abused by her half-brother, Amnon (II Sam. 13:12).

For further reference it should be noted that because of his extreme youth, Benjamin is not yet considered as being one of the brothers.

5. AND JOSEPH DREAMED A DREAM, AND HE TOLD IT HIS BRETHREN: AND THEY HATED HIM YET THE MORE.
6. AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, HEAR, I PRAY YOU, THIS DREAM WHICH I HAVE DREAMED:
7. FOR, BEHOLD, WE WERE BINDING SHEAVES IN THE FIELD, AND LO, MY SHEAF AROSE, AND ALSO STOOD UPRIGHT; AND, BEHOLD, YOUR SHEAVES STOOD ROUND ABOUT, AND MADE OBEISANCE TO MY SHEAF.
8. AND HIS BRETHREN SAID TO HIM, SHALT THOU INDEED REIGN OVER US? OR SHALT THOU HAVE DOMINION OVER US? AND THEY HATED HIM YET THE MORE FOR HIS DREAMS, AND FOR HIS WORDS.

The book leaves the symbols of dreams uninterpreted, and though the meaning is relatively clear there is no indication why these specific symbols are used. The word for *sheaf* never appears again in the books with which we have been dealing. However, the notion of *binding* may imply the unity of each tribe.

9. AND HE DREAMED YET ANOTHER DREAM, AND TOLD IT HIS BRETHREN, AND SAID, BEHOLD, I HAVE DREAMED A DREAM MORE; AND, BEHOLD, THE SUN AND THE MOON AND THE ELEVEN STARS MADE OBEISANCE TO ME.
10. AND HE TOLD IT TO HIS FATHER, AND TO HIS BRETHREN: AND HIS FATHER REBUKED HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, WHAT IS THIS DREAM THAT THOU HAST DREAMED? SHALL I AND THY MOTHER AND THY BRETHREN INDEED COME TO BOW DOWN OURSELVES TO THEE TO THE EARTH?

Given the author's way of relating the world to the human soul, the dream may be intended literally as well as metaphorically. During his rulership in Egypt Joseph, to a large extent, was able to rule over the famine; and if he can rule over famine, he rules over nature, and the sun and the moon do bow down to him.

11. AND HIS BRETHREN ENVIED HIM: BUT HIS FATHER OBSERVED THE MATTER.
12. AND HIS BRETHREN WENT TO FEED THEIR FATHER'S FLOCK IN SHECHEM.
13. AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH, DO NOT THY BREIHREN FEED THE FLOCK IN SHECHEM? COME, AND I WILL SEND THEE UNTO THEM. AND HE SAID TO HIM, HERE AM I.

14. AND HE SAID TO HIM GO I PRAY THEE, SEE WHETHER IT WILL BE WELL WITH THY BRETHREN, AND WELL WITH THE FLOCKS; AND BRING ME WORD AGAIN. SO HE SENT HIM OUT OF THE VALE OF HEBRON, AND HE CAME TO SHECHEM.

Israel sent Joseph to his brothers in *Shechem* though he had *observed* their feeling toward him. *Shechem* was the city in which they had already killed their brothers the Hivites and in which they could kill again.

The words *Go, I pray thee* and *Here am I* race through the reader's mind. They are bits and fragments of a conversation he had heard once before. God was asking Abraham to kill his only son, and now it looks as though the same thing will happen again.

Ever since the affair at Shechem Jacob knew that the new land could not be established without bloodshed. He can see no other solution to the problem posed by the eminence of his youngest son. Jacob, like Abraham, was sacrificing his dearest son and only hoped that through this sacrifice his sons, after reflecting on the horrors of their own deeds, would be able to pull themselves together and form a just society.

Near the end of the days of the Judges there was a series of incidents which make it evident that Jacob's fears, while they could be put to sleep, would one day awaken. First, there was the war between Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manassah, during the judgeship of Jephthah, in which forty-two thousand men of Ephraim were killed (Judg. 12:6). Now as we have pointed out before, the days of the Judges were a constant struggle in which Israel would be conquered, a Judge would arise to free them, but at his death another enemy would arise. After the deaths of the Ephraimites there was a series of three Judges who reigned in peace. The only time in which this record was approached was when two Judges peacefully led Israel after the kingship of Abimelech.

The problem came to light again, but this time it affected Joseph's younger brother Benjamin more directly. The massacre of the Benjaminites at the end of the Book of Judges made it evident to all that Israel desperately needed a king. In a somewhat more mitigated way the same theme reoccurred when Saul finally united the people by hewing the yoke of oxen and sending the pieces to all the tribes as a call to arms against the Ammonite.

15. AND A CERTAIN MAN FOUND HIM, AND, BEHOLD, HE WAS WANDERING IN THE FIELD: AND THE MAN ASKED HIM, SAYING, WHAT SEEKEST THOU?

16. AND HE SAID, I SEEK MY BRETHREN: TELL ME, I PRAY THEE, WHERE THEY FEED THEIR FLOCKS.

17. AND THE MAN SAID, THEY ARE DEPARTED HENCE: FOR I HEARD THEM SAY, LET US GO TO DOTHAN. AND JOSEPH WENT AFTER HIS BRETHREN, AND FOUND THEM IN DOTHAN.

Fortunately the brothers had left Shechem before Joseph's arrival and had gone to Dothan. When Joseph arrived at Shechem he was met by a mysterious man whose identity is not revealed. Therefore, we do not know whether it was the *man* with whom Jacob wrestled that lonely evening or not (Gen. 32:24). Nor do we know whether it was one of the *men* who stood in front of Abraham's tent (Gen. 18:2).

Dothan, the city in which Joseph was not killed, was also the scene of the famous war that wasn't in the time of Elisha (II Kings 6:13 and the commentary to Gen. 31:45).

18. AND WHEN THEY SAW HIM AFAR OFF, EVEN BEFORE HE CAME NEAR UNTO THEM, THEY CONSPIRED AGAINST HIM TO SLAY HIM.
19. AND THEY SAID ONE TO ANOTHER, BEHOLD, THIS DREAMER COMETH.
20. COME NOW, THEREFORE, AND LET US SLAY HIM, AND CAST HIM INTO SOME PIT; AND WE WILL SAY, SOME EVIL BEAST HATH DEVoured HIM: AND WE SHALL SEE WHAT WILL BECOME OF HIS DREAMS.
21. AND REUBEN HEARD IT, AND HE DELIVERED HIM OUT OF THEIR HANDS; AND SAID, LET US NOT KILL HIM.
22. AND REUBEN SAID UNTO THEM, SHED NO BLOOD, BUT CAST HIM INTO THIS PIT THAT IS IN THE WILDERNESS, AND LAY NO HAND UPON HIM; THAT HE MIGHT RID HIM OUT OF THEIR HANDS, TO DELIVER HIM TO HIS FATHER AGAIN.

Given the fact that Reuben slept with his father's wife in Gen. 35:22, it is surprising that he should be the one to try and save his brother's life. It is even more surprising that he should attempt the most pious solution—returning the son to his father. These are part of the fragments of Reuben's life which we shall try to piece together in the commentary to Gen. 47:5.

23. AND IT CAME TO PASS, WHEN JOSEPH WAS COME UNTO HIS BRETHREN, THAT THEY STRIPT JOSEPH OUT OF HIS COAT, HIS COAT OF MANY COLOURS THAT WAS ON HIM.
24. AND THEY TOOK HIM, AND CAST HIM INTO A PIT: AND THE PIT WAS EMPTY, THERE WAS NO WATER IN IT.

When the author says *And the pit was empty, there was no water in it*, he has in mind Chapter Twenty-six, Verse Thirty-seven, in which Isaac finally found water after all his diggings. If finding water was Isaac's great act then the availability of such underground sources seems to be related to the hidden springs of tradition. The implication is that from at least one point of view those sources have dried up and Joseph will have to begin again.

25. AND THEY SAT DOWN TO EAT BREAD: AND THEY LIFTED UP THEIR EYES AND LOOKED, AND BEHOLD, A COMPANY OF ISHMAELITES CAME FROM GIL



EAD, WITH THEIR CAMELS BEARING SPICERY AND BALM AND MYRRH, GOING TO CARRY IT DOWN TO EGYPT.

The caravan of Ishmaelites is carrying *spicery and balm and myrrh* to be sold in Egypt. The brothers do not realize that in thirty-five years they themselves will be making the same trip, carrying *spicery and balm and myrrh* (see Gen. 43:11, and for the calculation see the commentary to Gen. 47:28).

26. AND JUDAH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, WHAT PROFIT IS IT IF WE SLAY OUR BROTHER AND CONCEAL HIS BLOOD?

27. COME, AND LET US SELL HIM TO THE ISHMAELITES, AND LET NOT OUR HAND BE UPON HIM; FOR HE IS OUR BROTHER AND OUR FLESH. AND HIS BRETHREN HEARD HIM.

While Reuben's plan was the more pious, Judah's plan seems to be the wiser. This wisdom is displayed in several ways. First of all, he realizes that if Joseph were to return to his father's house, the same problems would arise again. He is also wise enough to realize that Joseph is capable of managing his own affairs even in difficult circumstances. Perhaps his greatest wisdom is revealed in the twofold nature of the appeal which he makes to his brothers. It was only after he had shown them that they would gain nothing by the murder of their brother that he appealed to the natural abhorrence of fratricide. He appeals both to what is lowest in them and to what is highest. Without the appeal to the lowest, they would not have *heard* the highest, and without the appeal to the highest they would have learned nothing.

28. AND THERE PASSED BY MIDIANITES, MERCHANTMEN; AND THEY DREW AND LIFTED JOSEPH OUT OF THE PIT, AND SOLD JOSEPH TO THE ISHMAELITES FOR TWENTY PIECES OF SILVER: AND THEY BROUGHT JOSEPH INTO EGYPT.

This passage has caused great difficulties over the centuries. According to Verse Twenty-eight, whoever drew Joseph out of the pit sold him to the Ishmaelites, who in turn sold him to the Egyptians. This is essentially in agreement with Gen. 39:1, which states that Potiphar bought Joseph from the Ishmaelites. One problem remains. According to Verse Thirty-six of the present chapter, it was the Midianites who sold Joseph to Potiphar. In addition we must ask ourselves why the Midianites are mentioned in the present verse. So far as the present author can see, there exist three possible solutions to the problem. The traditional solution given by the Rabbis is that the brothers took Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Midianites, who in turn sold him to the Ishmaelites, in which case we are to interpret the present verse as saying that the brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites via the Midianites, and that in Verse Thirty-six the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar via the Ishmaelites. The modern solution to the difficulty is to assume that there were originally two texts. According to one of them the brothers sold him to the Midianites, but accord-

ing to the other they sold him to the Ishmaelites. This position makes the further assumption that the redactor was careless or stupid.

There is one other possibility which should be examined, though it too has its difficulties. Since the Midianite merchants appear right before the words *they drew*, the normal way of interpreting Verse Twenty-eight would be to assume that it was the Midianites who drew Joseph out of the pit and sold him to the Ishmaelites. Under this assumption Verse Thirty-six would then be interpreted as it was by the Rabbis. This interpretation would also account for Gen. 42:22, in which Reuben says, *Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear me? Therefore, behold, also is his blood required.* Reuben obviously has in mind what he had said in Verse Twenty-two of the present chapter, and therefore one would assume that he is thinking more about placing Joseph in the pit rather than about selling him into slavery. In Gen. 42:13 the brothers, thinking of Joseph, merely say *And one is not*. The phrase is ambiguous because it could mean either *one is not with us* or *one no longer exists*, that is to say, he is dead. If the latter interpretation is intended, this would imply that the brothers did in fact believe that an evil beast found Joseph in the pit and devoured him. However if the first interpretation is intended, no conclusions can be reached. In any case, even after they have fully repented the brothers never speak of themselves as having sold Joseph into slavery.

Taking the *Midianites, merchantmen* as the subject of the verb *drew* would make sense if we assume that the Midianites, who were passing by, saw the brothers put Joseph into the pit and that the same plan occurred to them as had occurred to Judah.

In the meantime, since Reuben had intended to return to the pit secretly in order to free Joseph, it is more than likely that he would have arranged matters in such a way that their meal would have taken place at some distance from the pit, allowing him to release Joseph without being noticed.

This explanation would also account for the fact that even after they repent the brothers never admit to selling Joseph. If it was the Midianites who took Joseph out of the pit then it is more than likely that the brothers believed their own story about the wild animal. Because of Verse Thirty-six many of the ancient commentaries assumed that the Ishmaelites bought Joseph from the brothers and then sold him to the Midianites. This assumption makes more sense than the modern assumption of a corruption in the text, but it, too, is unnecessary, as we have seen. One need only assume that in Verse Thirty-six the author means that the Midianites sold Joseph into Egypt indirectly by selling him to the Ishmaelites.

The difficulty with this interpretation lies in Chapter Forty-five, Verses Four and Five, in which Joseph clearly speaks of his brothers as having sold him into Egypt. Two possibilities remain. If Joseph's statement is to be taken literally, one must reject the present hypothesis, in which case one is left with

the ambiguities in the present verse, in which the subject of the verb *drew* seems to be the Midianites. The other possibility will be discussed in the commentary to Gen. 45:3.

Although there may be no clear way of solving the present difficulty, several other notions present themselves for our consideration. No matter how one reads the present chapter it seems to be important to the author that the Midianites were present and were thus aware of the internal conflicts within Israel. This may in part account for their later actions. On the other hand, since the Ishmaelites are so rarely mentioned in the Bible one feels obliged to give an account of their presence. It may be that the author wished to connect Joseph's journey over desert country with the wild ass.

29. AND REUBEN RETURNED UNTO THE PIT; AND, BEHOLD, JOSEPH WAS NOT IN THE PIT; AND HE RENT HIS CLOTHES.
30. AND HE RETURNED UNTO HIS BRETHREN, AND SAID, THE CHILD IS NOT; AND I, WHITHER SHALL I GO?
31. AND THEY TOOK JOSEPH'S COAT, AND KILLED A KID OF THE GOATS, AND DIPPED THE COAT IN THE BLOOD;
32. AND THEY SENT THE COAT OF MANY COLOURS, AND THEY BROUGHT IT TO THEIR FATHER; AND SAID, THIS HAVE WE FOUND: RECOGNIZE I PRAY YOU WHETHER IT BE THY SON'S COAT OR NO.
33. AND HE RECOGNIZED IT, AND SAID IT IS MY SON'S COAT; AN EVIL BEAST HATH DEVoured HIM; JOSEPH IS WITHOUT DOUBT RENT IN PIECES.
34. AND JACOB RENT HIS CLOTHES, AND PUT SACKCLOTH UPON HIS LOINS, AND MOURNED FOR HIS SON MANY DAYS.
35. AND ALL HIS SONS AND ALL HIS DAUGHTERS ROSE UP TO COMFORT HIM; BUT HE REFUSED TO BE COMFORTED: AND HE SAID, FOR I WILL GO DOWN INTO THE GRAVE UNTO MY SON MOURNING. THUS HIS FATHER WEPT FOR HIM.

After having *heard* Judah, the brothers cannot actually bring themselves to tell the lie in speech, but Jacob draws the same conclusion—*an evil beast hath devoured him*.

It is difficult to know what Jacob meant by the words *evil beast*. After God presented the plan for the Jubilee Year on which so much depended, He said the following:

*And I will give peace in the land and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. (Lev. 26:6)*

Ezekiel has Leviticus in mind when he says:

*Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey: and I will judge between cattle and cattle. And I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the*

*Lord will be their God. And my servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land; and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods.* (Ez. 34:22–25)

Ezekiel's comment seems to be right—the *evil beasts* are men. Jacob in this verse is also thinking of men and only hopes the *evil beasts* will be quieted. Verse Thirty-five is full of strange passions. The father will not be comforted because he believes that his comforters are also the murderers. The sons wish to comfort because they are not sure in what way they are guilty and in what way they are innocent. The story is further complicated by the fact that the brothers may now believe their own lie.

36. AND THE MIDIANITES SOLD HIM INTO EGYPT UNTO POTIPHAR, AN OFFICER OF PHARAOH'S AND CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD.

The last verse of Chapter Thirty-seven begins life again in Egypt. It has a double function. Not only does it assure us that we will hear more of Joseph, but it will also force us to see Chapter Thirty-eight as part of the Joseph story.