

# The Lion and the Ass: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Chapters 44–50)

ROBERT SACKS

*St. John's College*

## CHAPTER XLIV

1. AND HE COMMANDED THE STEWARD OF HIS HOUSE, SAYING, FILL THE MEN'S SACKS WITH FOOD, AS MUCH AS THEY CAN CARRY, AND PUT EVERY MAN'S MONEY IN HIS SACK'S MOUTH.

The words *as much as they can carry* are filled with meaning for our author. The Hebrew word for *carry* is the same as the word for *lift* which was described at length in the commentary to Gen. 19:21.

As we shall see in the following chapters the imagery of *lifting* or *carrying* begins to shift a bit. In the early stages of the book it referred to God's willingness to accept the ways of man by placing them on a higher level. We shall see a shift in the imagery from God to man in which lifting will become the symbol of the brothers' willingness to accept the responsibilities of the New Way and carry the tradition.

2. AND PUT MY CUP, THE SILVER CUP, IN THE SACK'S MOUTH OF THE YOUNGEST, AND HIS CORN MONEY. AND HE DID ACCORDING TO THE WORD THAT JOSEPH HAD SPOKEN.

3. AS SOON AS THE MORNING WAS LIGHT, THE MEN WERE SENT AWAY, THEY AND THEIR ASSES.

4. AND WHEN THEY WERE GONE OUT OF THE CITY, AND NOT YET FAR OFF, JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS STEWARD, UP, FOLLOW AFTER THE MEN; AND WHEN THOU DOST OVERTAKE THEM, SAY UNTO THEM, WHEREFORE HAVE YE REWARDED EVIL FOR GOOD?

Joseph has now decided to put his brothers to the fullest test. He will place them in a position where they will be strongly tempted to treat Benjamin as they had treated him. The point of Joseph's trial is that repentance is only complete when one knows that if he were placed in the same position he would not act in the same way he had acted before.

5. IS NOT THIS IT IN WHICH MY LORD DRINKETH, AND WHEREBY INDEED HE DIVINETH? YE HAVE DONE EVIL IN SO DOING.

6. AND HE OVERTOOK THEM, AND HE SPAKE UNTO THEM THESE SAME WORDS.

7. AND THEY SAID UNTO HIM, WHEREFORE SAITH MY LORD THESE WORDS? GOD FORBID THAT THY SERVANTS SHOULD DO ACCORDING TO THIS THING:

The steward knows that the cup was not stolen since he himself placed the cup in Benjamin's sack. But he also knows that the cup contains no magical powers. He is certainly aware of the fact that Joseph is a human being like all others and that his magic is the magic of poetry and diplomacy.

8. BEHOLD, THE MONEY, WHICH WE FOUND IN OUR SACKS' MOUTHS, WE BROUGHT AGAIN UNTO THEE OUT OF THE LAND OF CANAAN: HOW THEN SHOULD WE STEAL OUT OF THY LORD'S HOUSE SILVER OR GOLD?  
9. WITH WHOMSOEVER OF THY SERVANTS IT BE FOUND, BOTH LET HIM DIE, AND WE ALSO WILL BE MY LORD'S BONDMEN.

Joseph's instructions to the steward in Verses Four and Five purposely avoided the word *cup* and replaced it with the words: *it in which my lord drinketh and whereby indeed he divineth*. The indirectness of the accusation increases their wonder which has now turned into confusion. Like Joseph they had spent time in jail, and they are now willing to become slaves, perhaps in recompense for the slavery which Joseph suffered.

10. AND HE SAID, NOW ALSO LET IT BE ACCORDING UNTO YOUR WORDS: HE WITH WHOM IT IS FOUND SHALL BE MY SERVANT; AND YE SHALL BE BLAMELESS.

Their willingness to become slaves was not the point of the trial, and the suggestion is therefore rejected. The important question is whether they are willing to see one of their brothers enslaved while they go free.

11. THEN THEY SPEEDILY TOOK DOWN EVERY MAN HIS SACK TO THE GROUND, AND OPENED EVERY MAN HIS SACK.  
12. AND HE SEARCHED, AND BEGAN AT THE ELDEST, AND LEFT AT THE YOUNGEST: AND THE CUP WAS FOUND IN BENJAMIN'S SACK.

The steward purposely leaves Benjamin's sack to the end in order to increase the suspense.

13. THEY THEY RENT THEIR CLOTHES, AND LADED EVERY MAN HIS ASS, AND RETURNED TO THE CITY.

There does not seem to be one brother who even considers returning home.

14. AND JUDAH AND HIS BRETHREN CAME TO JOSEPH'S HOUSE; FOR HE WAS YET THERE: AND THEY FELL BEFORE HIM ON THE GROUND.  
15. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO THEM, WHAT DEED IS THIS THAT YE HAVE DONE? WOT YE NOT THAT SUCH A MAN AS I CAN CERTAINLY DIVINE?  
16. AND JUDAH SAID, WHAT SHALL WE SAY UNTO MY LORD? WHAT SHALL WE SPEAK? OR HOW SHALL WE CLEAR OURSELVES? GOD HATH FOUND OUT THE INIQUITY OF THY SERVANTS: BEHOLD, WE ARE MY LORD'S SERVANTS, BOTH WE, AND HE ALSO WITH WHO THE CUP IS FOUND.

17. AND HE SAID, GOD FORBID THAT I SHOULD DO SO: BUT THE MAN IN WHOSE HAND THE CUP IS FOUND, HE SHALL BE MY SERVANT: AND AS FOR YOU, GET YOU UP IN PEACE UNTO YOUR FATHER.

Judah has finally emerged as the spokesman for the brothers. The simplicity of his speech is in sharp contrast to Joseph's magic. He disdains any attempt to discover which brother is guilty. Ever since he returned from Chezib it had been clear that each brother must be responsible for the others. His insight, that unity is even more important than discovering whether their sufferings are just or not, will express itself later in a very odd way.

After Jeroboam's revolution the kingdom will be split in two, and Judah will live apart from his brothers. This disunity, however, is an expression of Judah's understanding of unity. Most of the Book of Kings is devoted to the northern kingdom. Kings were constantly deposed and their houses toppled. But like the bass-string of an ancient harp Judah remained as a constant drone throughout the jagged history of the north.

Judah's way of maintaining unity both in the present case and throughout later history shows that he has found a place for himself among his brothers in a sense which Joseph will never fully understand, for Joseph's magic presupposes a great gap between himself and his brothers.

18. THEN JUDAH CAME NEAR UNTO HIM, AND SAID, OH MY LORD, LET THY SERVANT, I PRAY THEE, SPEAK A WORD IN MY LORD'S EARS, AND LET NOT THINE ANGER BURN AGAINST THY SERVANT: FOR THOU ART EVEN AS PHARAOH.

Judah speaks privately with his brother. He addresses him as *my lord* and treats him with all due respect, but the very fact of privateness begins to place them on the same level.

19. MY LORD ASKED HIS SERVANTS, SAYING, HAVE YE A FATHER, OR A BROTHER?

20. AND WE SAID UNTO MY LORD, WE HAVE A FATHER, AN OLD MAN, AND A CHILD OF HIS OLD AGE, A LITTLE ONE; AND HIS BROTHER IS DEAD, AND HE ALONE IS LEFT OF HIS MOTHER, AND HIS FATHER LOVETH HIM.

21. AND THOU SAIDST UNTO THY SERVANTS, BRING HIM DOWN UNTO ME, THAT I MAY SET MINE EYES UPON HIM.

22. AND WE SAID UNTO MY LORD, THE LAD CANNOT LEAVE HIS FATHER: FOR IF HE SHOULD LEAVE HIS FATHER, HIS FATHER WOULD DIE.

23. AND THOU SAIDST UNTO THY SERVANTS, EXCEPT YOUR YOUNGEST BROTHER COME DOWN WITH YOU, YE SHALL SEE MY FACE NO MORE.

24. AND IT CAME TO PASS WHEN WE CAME UP UNTO THY SERVANT MY FATHER, WE TOLD HIM THE WORDS OF MY LORD.

25. AND OUR FATHER SAID, GO AGAIN, AND BUY US A LITTLE FOOD.

26. AND WE SAID, WE CANNOT GO DOWN: IF OUR YOUNGEST BROTHER BE WITH

US, THEN WILL WE GO DOWN: FOR WE MAY NOT SEE THE MAN'S FACE, EXCEPT OUR YOUNGEST BROTHER BE WITH US.

27. AND THY SERVANT MY FATHER SAID UNTO US, YE KNOW THAT MY WIFE BARE ME TWO SONS:  
 28. AND THE ONE WENT OUT FROM ME, AND I SAID, SURELY HE IS TORN TO PIECES; AND I SAW HIM NOT SINCE:  
 29. AND IF YE TAKE THIS ALSO FROM ME, AND MISCHIEF BEFALL HIM, YE SHALL BRING DOWN MY GRAY HAIRS WITH SORROW TO THE GRAVE.  
 30. NOW THEREFORE WHEN I COME TO THY SERVANT MY FATHER, AND THE LAD BE NOT WITH US; SEEING THAT HIS LIFE IS BOUND UP IN THE LAD'S LIFE;  
 31. IT SHALL COME TO PASS, WHEN HE SEETH THAT THE LAD IS NOT WITH US, THAT HE WILL DIE, AND THY SERVANTS SHALL BRING DOWN THE GRAY HAIRS OF THY SERVANT OUR FATHER WITH SORROW TO THE GRAVE.

Judah calmly and simply presents the situation to Joseph as he did to Jacob in the preceding chapter. Verse nineteen is a fairly accurate statement of what Joseph might have asked, and Verse Twenty is a clear picture of the situation as it was in Canaan. In Twenty-two Judah seems to understand Joseph's desires but the rest of his speech is in part an accusation. Joseph's magic has come close to causing the old man's death.

32. FOR THY SERVANT BECAME PLEDGE FOR THE LAD UNTO MY FATHER, SAYING, IF I BRING HIM NOT UNTO THEE, THEN I SHALL BEAR THE BLAME TO MY FATHER FOR EVER.  
 33. NOW THEREFORE, I PRAY THEE. LET THY SERVANT ABIDE INSTEAD OF THE LAD A BONDMAN TO MY LORD; AND LET THE LAD GO UP WITH HIS BRETHREN.  
 34. FOR HOW SHALL I GO UP TO MY FATHER AND THE LAD BE NOT WITH ME? LEST PERADVENTURE I SEE THE EVIL THAT SHALL COME ON MY FATHER.

Judah's thoughts return to the *pledge* he gave to Tamar when he left his brothers, whose life he thought he could not share. He is now willing to accept the burden which he assumed in Canaan. His responsibility is that of a man. He makes no claim for any special relation to God; he has no magic and handles himself in a purely human way.

## CHAPTER XLV

1. THEN JOSEPH COULD NOT REFRAIN HIMSELF BEFORE ALL THEM THAT STOOD FIRMLY BY HIM; AND HE CRIED, CAUSE EVERY MAN TO GO OUT FROM ME. AND THERE STOOD NO MAN WITH HIM, WHILE JOSEPH MADE HIMSELF KNOWN UNTO HIS BRETHREN.  
 2. AND HE WEPT ALOUD: AND THE EGYPTIANS AND THE HOUSE OF PHARAOH HEARD.

Judah's speech was more effective than the sight of Benjamin, and Joseph was unable to restrain himself any longer. The verse contains two words which are normally translated *to stand*. The first one, which is used for the brothers, was used previously with regard to the ladder in Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:12). It implies being firmly fixed in position. Joseph allowed himself to reveal his identity only after he was certain that the brothers had been made firm by his magic. The word which has been translated *made himself known* will only appear one more time in the Bible. It is the word which God used to describe His own actions with regard to prophets (Num. 12:6). As we shall see, it is not accidental that the author uses such an imperious word.

*Weeping*, as opposed to *laughter*, is the highest passion of the book. The first tears were shed by Hagar over the danger to her son's life (Gen. 21:16). These tears gave her a higher position in our thoughts than Sarah and her laughter could ever reach. When Esau *wept* over the loss of the blessing we felt another force to that passion (Gen. 27:38). We could see the genuineness of his desire to carry on that blessing, and at the same time we were forced to hold in our minds his defects, which rendered him incapable of that great act which he so firmly wished to undertake.

*Weeping* is not always a sign of sadness. Jacob *wept* for the first time when he kissed Rachel and again when he was reunited with his brother. Esau (Gen. 29:11 and 33:5), but he was to *weep* later over what he supposed to be the death of Joseph.

With the exception of David, Joseph *weeps* more often than any other Biblical character. Up to this point his tears have been shed alone. They were the tears of a man who knows more than other men, and it is hard to say whether they were tears of joy or sadness. At this point the god, Joseph, master magician, reveals himself as a human being and vainly tries to reestablish contact with his brothers. While there is something genuine in Joseph's attempt to react to what he has learned from Judah we shall see in the next commentary the sad but necessary failure of that attempt.

Moses only *wept* once. At that time he was a baby abandoned in an ark, to be found by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:6). Those tears, which failed to give Joseph his humanity near the end of his life, ensured that humanity to Moses at the beginning of his.

During their journey in the desert, the Children of Israel cry on many occasions, but they only *weep* on special occasions. When they *wept* for food their needs were genuine, and they were answered (Num. 11:4,10,20). They *wept* again when they saw the giants whom they were genuinely incapable of overcoming at that time (Num. 14:1). The other three times that the Children of Israel *wept* are closely related and will be discussed when we consider the death of Aaron in the commentary to Gen. 49:5.

In the Book of Judges *weeping* is first a tool for Samson's wife (Judg. 15:16). Then it becomes refuge for a people who feel themselves obliged to make war on their own brothers, Israel against Benjamin (Judg. 20:23-26).

David seems to share two things with Joseph. He weeps and he is beautiful. In David's case both his tears and his beauty play an ambiguous role. It seems to be clear that he was more of a man when he *wept* before the death of Bath-sheba's son than he was when he *wept* at the death of Absalom.

The old American adage "laugh and the world laughs with you, weep and you weep alone" is false from the Biblical point of view. Laughter always implies a distance between the laugher and the world, but *weeping* is the one passion which can be shared by highest and lowest alike.

The tears which Hagar shed for Ishmael touch us as deeply as the tears which David shed prior to the death of Bath-sheba's first child. David's tears were not royal nor Hagar's slavish. But this common levelling of tears, which leaves no room for the distinction between king and slave, is a dangerous and subtle thing. It can both humanize and bestialize, as happened to David at the death of Absalom.

But Joseph was replaced by Judah and David succeeded by Josiah, and neither the one nor the other ever wept.

3. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, I AM JOSEPH; DOTH MY FATHER YET LIVE? AND HIS BRETHREN COULD NOT ANSWER HIM; FOR THEY WERE TROUBLED AT HIS PRESENCE.
4. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, COME NEAR TO ME, I PRAY YOU. AND THEY CAME NEAR, AND HE SAID, I AM JOSEPH YOUR BROTHER, WHOM YE SOLD INTO EGYPT.
5. NOW THEREFORE BE NOT GRIEVED. NOR ANGRY WITH YOURSELVES. THAT YE SOLD ME HITHER: FOR GOD DID SEND ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE LIFE.
6. FOR THESE TWO YEARS HATH THE FAMINE BEEN IN THE LAND: AND YET THERE ARE FIVE YEARS, IN THE WHICH THERE SHALL NEITHER BE SHEARING NOR HARVEST.
7. AND GOD SENT ME BEFORE YOU TO PRESERVE YOU A POSTERITY IN THE EARTH, AND TO SAVE YOUR LIVES BY A GREAT DELIVERANCE.
8. SO NOW IT WAS NOT YOU THAT SENT ME HITHER, BUT GOD: AND HE HATH MADE ME A FATHER TO PHARAOH, AND LORD OF ALL HIS HOUSE. AND A RULER THROUGHOUT ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT.
9. HASTE YE, AND GO UP TO MY FATHER, AND SAY UNTO HIM. THUS SAITH THY SON JOSEPH, GOD HATH MADE ME LORD OF ALL EGYPT: COME DOWN UNTO ME, TARRY NOT.
10. AND THOU SHALT DWELL IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN, AND THOU SHALT BE NEAR UNTO ME, THOU, AND THY CHILDREN, AND THY CHILDREN'S CHILDREN, AND THY FLOCKS, AND THY HERDS, AND ALL THAT THOU HAST:
11. AND THERE WILL I NOURISH THEE; FOR YET THERE ARE FIVE YEARS OF FAMINE; LEST THOU, AND THY HOUSEHOLD, AND ALL THAT THOU HAST COME TO POVERTY.

After asking Pharaoh's servants to leave the room Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. He made a somewhat desperate attempt to meet them as brothers, but there was something which prevented that meeting.

He began by enquiring about his father. Since he had already asked that question in the preceding chapter one can only assume that the question was asked in an attempt to put his brothers at ease by presenting a topic for conversation. If this, however, was his intention, it is clear from the remainder of the verse that he did not succeed. The brothers still remained standing and confused.

Next, in Verses Four and Five, Joseph refers to the brothers as having sold him into Egypt. He is trying to soothe their feelings by explaining to them that whatever they did, it was in accordance with God's plan. No matter how one interprets Chapter Thirty-seven it is clear that the brothers did not sell Joseph directly into the hands of the Egyptians. Since Joseph is re-telling the story in brief, his statement is again compatible with either alternative.

To the reader there is something awkward and disturbing in Joseph's great claim that he will nourish his brothers during the five years of famine. His words seem honest and sincere, yet he appears to have wholly misunderstood the divine plan of which he is speaking. Joseph failed to understand that those five years of honor would drag on into four hundred years of slavery. Joseph was so caught up in his own magic that he was unable to see the toils and difficulties which would have to be endured before his brothers would return to their home. The author of Genesis shows his great sensitivity to men and their ways by forcing the reader to face Joseph's greatest weakness within the same speech that shows his strength. The reader must neither be beguiled by his humanity nor believe that humanity to be mere pretense.

12. AND BEHOLD, YOUR EYES SEE, AND THE EYES OF MY BROTHER, BENJAMIN, THAT IT IS MY MOUTH THAT SPEAKETH UNTO YOU.
13. AND YE SHALL TELL MY FATHER OF ALL MY GLORY IN EGYPT, AND OF ALL THAT YE HAVE SEEN; AND YE SHALL HASTE AND BRING DOWN MY FATHER HITHER.
14. AND HE FELL UPON HIS BROTHER BENJAMIN'S NECK, AND WEPT; AND BENJAMIN WEPT UPON HIS NECK.
15. MOREOVER HE KISSED ALL HIS BRETHREN, AND WEPT UPON THEM; AND AFTER THAT HIS BRETHREN TALKED WITH HIM.
16. AND THE FAME THEREOF WAS HEARD IN PHARAOH'S HOUSE, SAYING JOSEPH'S BRETHREN ARE COME: AND IT PLEASD PHARAOH WELL, AND HIS SLAVES.

Joseph is the mighty ruler of all Egypt who has provided well for his father and brothers; but Verse Sixteen reminds us that Pharaoh has *slaves*, and in spite of Joseph's reassuring words it is difficult to forget that Israel will soon be among them.

A distinction was made in Verse Two which was not fully intelligible at first.

The verse read: *And Joseph wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.* The distinction between *Pharaoh* and *Egyptians* is maintained throughout the book and presents the reader with some of the gravest difficulties concerning the nature of political life. In order to see this problem one need only forget Pharaoh and his army for a moment and concentrate on the individual Egyptians one meets in the story. First there was Hagar, a sensitive mother who suffered under Sarah's harsh rule, and there was her deep love for her child. Then there was Potiphar, whose trust in Joseph appears unlimited, especially if, as seems to be the case, he was the warden of the prison. The next Egyptian we shall meet is the daughter of Pharaoh, who risked her life to save a Hebrew child whom she found in an ark floating down the river.

When the Hebrew slaves were about to leave Egypt, the Egyptian people freely lent them their gold and silver. The only other private Egyptian we shall meet is the Egyptian, slave to Amalek, who was of such help to David when he won his first battle against the Amalekites who had destroyed his camp at Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:11–15).

The law of Moses is clearly aware of the distinction between the Egyptian people and Pharaoh's army. There is a law which reads *Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian because thou wast a sojourner in his land* (Deut. 23:8).

The author seriously means that we must have a soul large enough to hold both the decency of the Egyptian people and the necessity for escaping from the cruelty of Pharaoh's house at the same time. The Midrash tells a story concerning the time when the Children of Israel finally crossed the Sea of Reeds. They say that Moses gave a party in celebration, to which he invited God. God, according to the rabbis, answered Moses by saying that while he thought it was proper that His people should celebrate their new freedom, He, for His own part, would stay home to mourn the death of His Egyptian sons.

17. AND PHARAOH SAID UNTO JOSEPH, SAY UNTO THY BRETHREN, THIS DO YE:

LADE YOUR BEASTS AND GO, GET YOU UNTO THE LAND OF CANAAN:

18. AND TAKE YOUR FATHER AND YOUR HOUSEHOLDS, AND COME UNTO ME:

AND I WILL GIVE YOU THE GOODS OF THE LAND OF EGYPT, AND YE SHALL EAT THE FAT OF THE LAND.

19. NOW THOU ART COMMANDED, THIS DO YE: TAKE YOU WAGONS OUT OF THE LAND OF EGYPT FOR YOUR LITTLE ONES, AND FOR YOUR WIVES, AND BRING YOUR FATHER, AND COME.

The *wagons* which Pharaoh gave to Joseph to carry his father into Egypt must be distinguished from the *chariots* we discussed in the commentary to Gen. 41:43. Chariots were always considered as foreign to the New Way, but *wagons* seem to be an integral part of it. Six *wagons* (Num. 7:3–8) were provided by Israel to carry the tabernacle accessories. They were used again to carry the Ark prior to the kingship of Saul, and again when David made his aborted attempt to

establish a new home for the Ark (I Sam. 6:8–14; II Sam. 6:3 and commentary to Gen. 21:1).

20. ALSO REGARD NOT YOUR STUFF; FOR THE GOOD OF ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT IS YOURS.

There can be no doubt about Pharaoh's integrity and the genuineness of his desire to provide for Joseph and his family. Yet his assurance that Israel need not provide for itself will lead Israel into dependence and slavery. The verse literally reads: *Your eyes shall not have pity on your stuff*. In the Book of Deuteronomy the words *Your eyes shall not have pity* almost reach the point of becoming a technical, legal term. They appear five times in the book, each time with regard to the carrying out of a difficult punishment.

The Mosaic law does not show itself to be a lenient law. On the surface it appears harsh to the modern reader. In many ways this appearance was deliberate. Yet if one is willing to look at the fine print to see how the law was actually carried out a very different story emerges. A trial of any grave significance required gathering together seventy old men from various parts of the country. After that had been accomplished no punishment could be meted out except on the testimony of two eye-witnesses. There were no jails, and in most cases crimes which we today would consider criminal were then considered to be civil. According to modern law, thievery is a crime against the state punishable by fine and/or imprisonment. To be sure, if the stolen goods are discovered, they are returned to their original owner, but that is not considered primary. In Biblical law the courts regarded themselves in such cases as an arbitrator between two parties. If the defendant was found guilty his duty was toward the injured party. He had to return the stolen goods together with interest. The interest played a double function. It acted as a deterrent and also compensated in general for loss due to theft.

Under such a law, one can see the absolute importance of the honesty of witnesses. According to Biblical law a witness who lies is given the same punishment that would have been meted out had his testimony been accepted. There are occasions when it is difficult to bring oneself to execute this law, and yet the importance of truthful witnesses is so great that one must. In reference to the law concerning false witnesses the formulation *Your eyes shall not have pity* is used (Deut. 19:21). It is used as well for the case of intentional murder since it is always hard to put a man to death (Deut. 19:13). It was also used in the case of a man who was faced with the problem of exposing a relative who had attempted to cajole him into idolatry.

The formulation is used in only two other places. One case concerns a woman whose husband had been attacked and who, in order to come to the assistance of her husband, *putteth forth her hand and taketh him by the secrets*. The punishment for such a crime is somewhat severe, partly because a man does not own his own seed, and partly because even human life does not have a completely clear

claim to absolute superiority over human dignity. Nonetheless, it would be very difficult not to pity such a woman (Deut. 25:12). The formulation is also used with regard to the problems which we discussed in the last commentary (Deut. 6:16).

21. AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL DID SO: AND JOSEPH GAVE THEM WAGONS,  
ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF PHARAOH, AND GAVE THEM  
PROVISION FOR THE WAY.

22. TO ALL OF THEM HE GAVE EACH MAN CHANGES OF RAIMENT; BUT TO  
BENJAMIN, HE GAVE THREE HUNDRED PIECES OF SILVER, AND FIVE CHANGES  
OF RAIMENT.

We discussed the importance of new clothing in the commentary to Gen. 41:14.

23. AND TO HIS FATHER HE SENT AFTER THIS MANNER: TEN ASSES LADEN WITH  
THE GOOD THINGS OF EGYPT, AND TEN SHE ASSES LADEN WITH CORN AND  
BREAD AND MEAT FOR HIS FATHER BY THE WAY.

24. SO HE SENT HIS BRETHREN AWAY, AND THEY DEPARTED: AND HE SAID UNTO  
THEM, SEE THAT YE QUARREL NOT ON THE WAY.

The *asses* spoken of in Verse Twenty-three, and which will reoccur throughout the book, are tame asses as distinguished from the *wild ass* which was the symbol of Ishmael (see Gen. 16:20 and commentary).

Joseph's warning to his brothers, which may have been no more than a jest at the time, has deeper significance in the light of the events which will occur on their next journey from Egypt to Canaan four hundred years later.

25. AND THEY WENT UP OUT OF EGYPT, AND CAME INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN  
UNTO JACOB THEIR FATHER,

26. AND TOLD HIM, SAYING, JOSEPH IS YET ALIVE, AND HE IS GOVERNOR OVER  
ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT. AND JACOB'S HEART FAINTED, FOR HE BELIEVED  
THEM NOT.

27. AND THEY TOLD HIM ALL THE WORDS OF JOSEPH, WHICH HE HAD SAID UNTO  
THEM: AND WHEN HE SAW THE WAGONS WHICH JOSEPH HAD SENT TO  
CARRY HIM, THE SPIRIT OF JACOB THEIR FATHER REVIVED:

28. AND ISRAEL SAID, IT IS ENOUGH: JOSEPH MY SON IS YET ALIVE: I WILL GO AND  
SEE HIM BEFORE I DIE.

By the end of the chapter Jacob had already firmly decided to go into Egypt. That fact will be crucial for understanding the beginning of Chapter Forty-six. Jacob's decision was a strange one since it seems to have been based on the sight of the wagons and the news that he would be carried to his son on these wagons. This may be important because the author uses for the word *carry* the word which we have formerly translated *lifted*. We had occasion to discuss this word

in some detail in the commentary to Gen. 19:21 where it emerged as the symbol of the motion of the book itself. This would seem to imply that Jacob sees his journey as an integral part of that motion.

## CHAPTER XLVI

I. AND ISRAEL TOOK HIS JOURNEY WITH ALL THAT HE HAD, AND CAME TO BEERSHEBA, AND OFFERED SACRIFICES UNTO THE GOD OF HIS FATHER ISAAC.

Before leaving for Egypt, Jacob went to Beersheba, where he and God spoke together for the last time. As we have already had occasion to see in the commentary to Gen. 22:19, Beersheba served not only as the border town *par excellence* in the geographical sense for many years, but in one way or another has always been connected with the last direct contact between man and God.

The name itself means *the Well of Oaths*. As a border town in the double sense it would seem to be Israel's contact with the waters of chaos. If that is true then the oath would seem to be that by virtue of which Israel is enabled to come into contact with those waters without being completely overwhelmed by them.

Jacob sacrifices to *the God of his father Isaac*. Given Isaac's character, it would not be inappropriate to call this God the *God of sleep*. Jacob, who had travelled to Haran, and in his independence of action resembled his grandfather Abraham, makes his final obeisance to the God of Isaac, i.e. the God of Sleep, because Israel, like a caterpillar, will sleep in the cocoon of Egypt for four hundred years.

2. AND GOD SPAKE UNTO ISRAEL IN THE VISIONS OF THE NIGHT, AND SAID, JACOB, JACOB. AND HE SAID, HERE AM I.

The same conversation took place before. The only difference is that the text now reads *Jacob, Jacob* instead of *Abraham, Abraham* (see Gen. 22:11, 22:1 and commentary). In each case these were the last words they spoke to God. They manifest the full presence and attention of a man who is willing to wait and keep himself constantly prepared. This conversation between man and God will begin again four hundred years later. That time the conversation will read *Moses, Moses*, but otherwise everything will be the same (Ex. 3:4). It is as if the two conversations merge and the intervening years suddenly disappear. It almost begins to be possible to speak of *the* Biblical hero when one reads the words *And He said, Samuel, Samuel, and he said, Here I am* (I Sam. 3:3). The words which Jacob heard as he dreamt woke Samuel out of his sleep.

3. AND HE SAID, I AM GOD, THE GOD OF THY FATHER: FEAR NOT TO GO DOWN INTO EGYPT; FOR I WILL THERE MAKE OF THEE A GREAT NATION:

4. I WILL GO DOWN WITH THEE INTO EGYPT, AND I WILL ALSO SURELY BRING THEE UP AGAIN: AND JOSEPH SHALL PUT HIS HAND UPON THINE EYES.

As has been the case ever since Jacob's dream, the contents of God's words at first seem pointless. The promises have already been made, and Jacob had already decided to go into Egypt. Some things, however, are new. God will fall completely silent for almost four generations, in spite of His promise to be in Egypt. One might be tempted to call this period of dreamless sleep the highest manifestation of God. From the Biblical point of view memory, and not nature, is the guarantor of that which distinguishes the life of man from the life of the beasts; but as we saw in the commentary to Gen. 38:30, only God can guarantee the memory of a sleeping man.

In what might be called God's lullaby He makes the nature of His promise clear. Seeds will not grow in the open air. Egypt will become the womb of earth for Israel. The establishment of the New Way would be impossible otherwise. Laws are only meaningful when they are given to a people, and yet no people can exist without laws. If there is no nature, the first impression of law is indelible. This being the case, giving law would seem to be impossible, since without law there can be no people and without a people there can be no law. The only solution to this paradox is a people which is not a people. Paradoxically, only slaves are empty enough to receive the New Way.

This is what God is trying to indicate to Jacob in His last, rather strange speech. When God says *Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes* he is referring to Joseph's magic, which, as we saw in the last chapter, lulled the sons of Israel to sleep so that they could not see what would be in store for them in Egypt. Joseph's speech about God's providence in the last chapter turns out to be true only on a much deeper level than he could realize. From the point of view of Chapter Forty-five, Joseph's magic blinded him to slavery, but in the present chapter that slavery appears as well-needed sleep.

5. AND JACOB ROSE UP FROM BEER-SHEBA: AND THE SONS OF ISRAEL CARRIED JACOB THEIR FATHER, AND THEIR LITTLE ONES, AND THEIR WIVES, IN THE WAGONS WHICH PHARAOH HAD SENT TO CARRY HIM.
6. AND THEY TOOK THEIR CATTLE, AND THEIR GOODS, WHICH THEY HAD GOTTEN IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, AND CAME INTO EGYPT, JACOB, AND ALL HIS SEED WITH HIM:
7. HIS SONS, AND HIS SONS' SONS WITH HIM, HIS DAUGHTERS, AND HIS SONS' DAUGHTERS, AND ALL HIS SEED BROUGHT HE WITH HIM INTO EGYPT.

This is the description of how Jacob left Beersheba to go beyond the borders of his world into the surrounding water. Verses Six and Seven stress the fact that he took his seed with him. This is the seed which he shall plant in the waters of chaos. The old man was carried by the wagon of Pharaoh. The deep connection

between this journey and the nature of time was already discussed in the commentary to Gen. 45:27.

8. AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, WHICH CAME INTO EGYPT, JACOB AND HIS SONS: REUBEN, JACOB'S FIRSTBORN.
9. AND THE SONS OF REUBEN; HANOKH, AND PHALLU, AND HEZRON, AND CARMI.
10. AND THE SONS OF SIMEON: JEMUEL AND JAMIN, AND OHAD, AND JACHIN, AND ZOHAR, AND SHAUL THE SON OF A CANAANITISH WOMAN.
11. AND THE SONS OF LEVI: GERSHON, KOHATH, AND MERARI.
12. AND THE SONS OF JUDAH: ER, AND ONAN, AND SHELAH, AND PHAREZ, AND ZARAH: BUT ER AND ONAN DIED IN THE LAND OF CANAAN. AND THE SONS OF PHAREZ WERE HEZRON AND HAMUL.
13. AND THE SONS OF ISSACHAR: TOLA, AND PHUVAH, AND JOB, AND SHIMRON.
14. AND THE SONS OF ZEBULUN: SERED, AND ELON, AND JAHLEEL.
15. THESE BE THE SONS OF LEAH, WHICH SHE BARE UNTO JACOB IN PADAN-ARAM, WITH HIS DAUGHTER DINAH: ALL THE SOULS OF HIS SONS AND HIS DAUGHTERS WERE THIRTY AND THREE.
16. AND THE SONS OF GAD: ZIPHION, AND HAGGI, SHUNI, AND EZBON, ERI, AND ARODI, AND ARELI.
17. AND THE SONS OF ASHER: JIMNAH, AND ISHUAH, AND ISUI, AND BERIAH, AND SERAH THEIR SISTER: AND THE SONS OF BERIAH: HEBER, AND MALCHIEL.
18. THESE ARE THE SONS OF ZILPAH, WHOM LABAN GAVE TO LEAH HIS DAUGHTER, AND THESE SHE BARE UNTO JACOB, EVEN SIXTEEN SOULS.
19. THE SONS OF RACHEL, JACOB'S WIFE: JOSEPH, AND BENJAMIN.
20. AND UNTO JOSEPH, IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, WERE BORN MANASSEH AND EPHRAIM, WHICH ASENATH THE DAUGHTER OF POTIPHERAH PRIEST OF ON, BARE UNTO HIM.
21. AND THE SONS OF BENJAMIN WERE BELAH, AND BECHER, AND ASHBEL, GERA, AND NAAMAN, EHI, AND ROSH, MUPPIM AND HUPPIM, AND ARD.
22. THESE ARE THE SONS OF RACHEL, WHICH WERE BORN TO JACOB: ALL SOULS WERE FOURTEEN.
23. AND THE SONS OF DAN: HUSHIM.
24. AND THE SONS OF NAPHTALI: JAHZEEL, AND GUNI, AND JEZER AND SHILLEM.
25. THESE ARE THE SONS OF BILHAH, WHICH LABAN GAVE UNTO RACHEL HIS DAUGHTER, AND SHE BARE THESE UNTO JACOB: ALL THE SOULS WERE SEVEN.
26. ALL THE SOULS THAT CAME WITH JACOB INTO EGYPT, WHICH CAME OUT OF HIS LOINS, BESIDES JACOB'S SONS' WIVES, ALL THE SOULS WERE THREESCORE AND SIX.
27. AND THE SONS OF JOSEPH, WHICH WERE BORN HIM IN EGYPT WERE TWO SOULS: ALL THE SOULS OF THE HOUSE OF JACOB, WHICH CAME INTO EGYPT, WERE THREESCORE AND TEN.

The present verses contain certain difficulties which the present commentator is unable to explain. In reference to the descendants of Leah, Verse Fifteen says

*All the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three.* There were thirty-one male descendants, and Dinah would make the thirty-second. One way of explaining the number thirty-three is to assume that there was another daughter. This assumption would account for the use of the word *daughters* in the plural in Verse Fifteen. The number of Zilpah's descendants is correctly given as sixteen in Verse Eighteen, and the descendants of Bilhah are correctly given as seven in Verse Twenty-five. That would make a grand total of fifty-six. Benjamin and his sons together account for eleven, making a total of sixty-seven; whereas Verse Twenty-six claims that *All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six.* This difficulty could be explained on the assumption that there was no second daughter and that Jacob himself was included in the thirty-three mentioned in Verse Fifteen, but was not included in the threescore and six mentioned in Verse Twenty-six. That would account for the total of seventy in Verse Twenty-seven but would not account for Verse Fifteen, in which *daughters* are mentioned in the plural and in which, according to this way of calculating, Jacob would have to be included as being one of his own sons. If on the other hand Jacob is not included in Verse Fifteen, there must have been another daughter, which would have made the sum total seventy-one. The Rabbis argue that the sons of Joseph did not *come down* into Egypt and hence are not to be included, leaving the total at sixty-nine. They go on to argue that the seventieth was God Himself, who came down into Egypt with Jacob. Their conclusions are certainly in agreement with what has been said in other places and therefore are as reasonable an account of the passage as one can have. The advantage of this explanation is that it accounts for the stress laid upon the numbers and is perhaps even more persuasive in the light of Verse Four.

28. AND HE SENT JUDAH BEFORE HIM UNTO JOSEPH, TO DIRECT HIS FACE UNTO GOSHEN: AND THEY CAME UNTO THE LAND OF GOSHEN.

Instead of going directly to Joseph, Jacob decided to go to the land of Goshen and to have Judah bring Joseph to him. Joseph had already suggested the land of Goshen, and apparently Jacob wished to ensure some geographical distinction between his own people and the Egyptians (Gen. 45:10). This geographical separation, which will ensure the possibility of return, is reemphasized in the Book of Exodus when Goshen will escape the plagues which will cover the land of Egypt (Ex. 8:18 and 9:26).

29. AND JOSEPH MADE READY HIS CHARIOT, AND WENT UP TO MEET ISRAEL HIS FATHER, TO GOSHEN, AND PRESENTED HIMSELF UNTO HIM: AND HE FELL ON HIS NECK, AND WEPT ON HIS NECK A GOOD WHILE.

30. AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH, NOW LET ME DIE, SINCE I HAVE SEEN THY FACE, BECAUSE THOU ART YET ALIVE.

Jacob's joy in seeing Joseph is two-fold. Not only is there the pleasure of seeing his son Joseph, but there is also the assurance that he had erred in believing his sons to have killed him. Jacob's tears in that sense are akin to those he shed during his final meeting with Esau, when it appeared as though a complete reconciliation would be possible (Gen. 33:4). The inevitability of fratricide seemed ever present, but again at this moment, as in the meeting with Esau, the New Way was able to avoid what seemed to Jacob to be inevitable.

At this moment Jacob is aware that his life's work of establishing a new foundation, a foundation that did not require the arbitrary and hence the violent division of fratricide, is at an end, and he is willing to die.

31. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, AND UNTO HIS FATHER'S HOUSE, I WILL GO UP, AND SHEW PHARAOH, AND SAY UNTO HIM, MY BRETHREN, AND MY FATHER'S HOUSE, WHICH WERE IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, ARE COME UNTO ME;
32. AND THE MEN SHEPHERDS, FOR THEIR TRADE HATH BEEN TO FEED CATTLE: AND THEY HAVE BROUGHT THEIR FLOCKS, AND THEIR HERDS, AND ALL THAT THEY HAVE.
33. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS, WHEN PHARAOH SHALL CALL YOU, AND SHALL SAY, WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION?
34. THAT YE SHALL SAY, THY SERVANTS' TRADE HATH BEEN ABOUT CATTLE FROM OUR YOUTH EVEN UNTIL NOW, BOTH WE, AND ALSO OUR FATHERS: THAT YE MAY DWELL IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN; FOR EVERY SHEPHERD IS AN ABOMINATION UNTO THE EGYPTIANS.

Joseph's plan is somewhat delicate. There are two problems which he must face. The general problem is to establish a temporary residence for his brothers which will allow them a place of honor and which at the same time will not seduce them into Egyptian ways. The means which Joseph uses are very strange. He has decided to have them present themselves to Pharaoh as men whose *trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers*. Joseph has chosen an elaborate way of saying that his brothers are *shepherds*. The elaborate speech and its appeal to the nobility of tradition was meant to ensure their honor in spite of the fact that *shepherds* were considered an *abomination* by the Egyptians. The *abomination* itself will ensure the separation.

The possibility of this device can be better understood by comparing those actions which the Egyptians hold to be *abominable* with those actions which Israel regards as *abominable*.

In the Bible three things are said to be *abominable* to the Egyptians. In every case they seem to reflect a disagreement with Israel on the proper relation between men and sheep, if not with the animal kingdom in general. Moses requested Pharaoh to let the people go for a three-day journey in order to sacrifice to the Lord since they would sacrifice *the abomination of the Egyptians* (Ex.

8:22). In addition to holding *shepherds* in *abomination* they were said to consider it *abominable* to eat with a Hebrew (Gen. 43:22), but since meat was served at the meal (Gen. 43:16) the same notions may have been involved. In general it would seem to be the case that in the eyes of the Egyptians man's assumption of his simple priority to the animal world as a whole is *abominable*. The reader would do well to remember the animal gods of the Egyptians, such as the Ibex, Thoth, etc.

In the Book of Leviticus there are two sections which deal with the *abominable*. In each case the major problem is sodomy, which according to Leviticus is the most fundamental distinction between Israel and all the other nations.

*22. Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination. 23. Neither shalt thou lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith: neither shall any woman stand before a beast to lie down thereto: it is confusion. 24. Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you: 25. And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants. 26. Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: 27. (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) 28. That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you. 29. For whosoever shall commit any of these abominations, even the souls that commit them shall be cut off from among their people. 30. Therefore shall ye keep Mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God. (Lev. 18:22–30; see also Lev. 20:13)*

Verse Twenty-four is perhaps one of the strongest distinctions between Israel and the other nations presented in the Bible. In modern times we tend to think of the belief in the oneness of God as the most fundamental distinction between Israel and the other nations, but at this point the most fundamental distinction seems to be the rejection of sodomy and homosexuality. As part of this general point of view it was also held *abominable* for a man to dress as a woman or for a woman to dress as a man (Deut. 22:5).

Idolatry was also called *abominable* in several places, but presumably the rejection of idolatry is related to the rejection of sodomy, since idolatry presupposes human, if not superhuman nobility in the animal kingdom (Deut. 7:25,26, 13:15 and 27:15).

The same general notion is behind the use of the word *abomination* to describe the sacrifice of children since from the pagan point of view the children are returned thereby to their animal status (Deut. 12:21, 18:9–12, and II Kings 16:3).

There seems to be a general agreement between Egypt and Israel that the most *abominable* actions are those which disturb the proper relation between man and the animal world. From the Egyptian point of view that proper relation is the re-

lation of unity which manifests itself in the rejection of shepherds in favor of sodomy. This unity also presupposes that the distinction between male and female is not fundamental, hence there is no strong prohibition against homosexuality or transvestitism.

From the Biblical point of view cosmic order can be ensured only by human actions which constantly reinforce the distinctions which were made during the six days of Creation. From the present point of view paganism, rejoicing in cosmic unity, has a certain kinship with philosophy, since philosophy can afford, upon occasion, to disregard fundamental distinctions, not because they are irrelevant as paganism presupposes, but because nature ensures that those boundaries will not collapse even though man might disregard them momentarily in order to see another side of the world.

Thus far all attempts to confuse the distinctions implicit in Creation have been called *abominable*. The political implications of the disgust which the addressee of the Bible is to feel for the loss of due proportion can be readily seen in the following verses:

*Thou shalt not have in thine house divers measurers, a great and a small. But thou shalt have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure shalt thou have: that thy days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. For all that do such things, and all that do unrighteously, are an abomination unto the Lord thy God. (Deut. 25:14–16)*

The Biblical rejection of a simple unity between man and the animal world was discussed in the commentary to Gen. 9:4, in which we saw that the beauties of this pagan notion are ultimately injurious to the special feeling of unity which man must have for man once the necessity for law arises.

## CHAPTER XLVII

1. THEN JOSEPH CAME AND TOLD PHARAOH, AND SAID, MY FATHER AND MY BRETHREN, AND THEIR FLOCKS, AND THEIR HERDS, AND ALL THAT THEY HAVE, ARE COME OUT OF THE LAND OF CANAAN; AND, BEHOLD THEY ARE IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN.
2. AND HE TOOK SOME OF HIS BRETHREN, EVEN FIVE MEN, AND PRESENTED THEM UNTO PHARAOH.
3. AND PHARAOH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, WHAT IS YOUR OCCUPATION? AND THEY SAID UNTO PHARAOH, THY SERVANTS ARE SHEPHERDS, BOTH WE, AND ALSO OUR FATHERS.
4. THEY SAID MOREOVER UNTO PHARAOH, FOR TO SOJOURN IN THE LAND ARE WE COME; FOR THY SERVANTS HAVE NO PASTURE FOR THEIR FLOCKS; FOR THE FAMINE IS SORE IN THE LAND OF CANAAN: NOW THEREFORE, WE PRAY THEE. LET THY SERVANTS DWELL IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN.

In spite of the fact that Joseph made his plans very carefully, his brothers were more forthright and introduced themselves as *shepherds*. Their request is somewhat ambivalent. First they ask for a place to *sojourn*. This is tantamount to requesting the status of an alien or temporary resident. In Verse Four they present their request in terms of a temporary need, but by the end of this verse the brothers suggest that they may stay longer by using the word *dwell*, which usually has more permanent connotations.

5. AND PHARAOH SPAKE UNTO JOSEPH, SAYING, THY FATHER AND THY BRETHREN ARE COME UNTO THEE:  
 6. THE LAND OF EGYPT IS BEFORE THEE; IN THE BEST OF THE LAND MAKE THY FATHER AND BRETHREN TO DWELL; IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN LET THEM DWELL: AND IF THOU KNOWEST ANY MEN OF ACTIVITY AMONG THEM, THEN MAKE THEM RULERS OVER MY CATTLE.

Instead of speaking to the brothers directly, Pharaoh addresses his answer to Joseph. Apparently Pharaoh's welcome is ultimately connected to his relationship with Joseph and is not directed to the brothers themselves. This situation may forebode some difficulties which will appear when Joseph dies and the connection between Pharaoh and the brothers is lost.

7. AND JOSEPH BROUGHT IN JACOB HIS FATHER, AND SET HIM BEFORE PHARAOH: AND JACOB BLESSED PHARAOH.  
 8. AND PHARAOH SAID UNTO JACOB, HOW OLD ART THOU?

Pharaoh's conversation with Jacob reveals the difference between the New Way and the Way of the Egyptians. Pharaoh is able to respect Jacob in spite of the fact that according to his own tradition Jacob practices an abominable art, but Jacob would not be able to have such respect for anyone who practices *abominable things*.

The New Way claims that what it considers abominable should be considered as such by all men. From the Biblical point of view the order of heaven and earth should not be disturbed by any living man (see commentary to Gen. 46:31). But from the point of view of paganism that order may be understood differently by different peoples without any fundamental contradiction.

The author seems to present the difficulties by showing Pharaoh receiving a blessing from a man whom he should consider abominable.

9. AND JACOB SAID UNTO PHARAOH, THE DAYS OF THE YEARS IN WHICH I DWELT AS A STRANGER ARE AN HUNDRED AND THIRTY YEARS: FEW AND EVIL HAVE THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF MY LIFE BEEN, AND HAVE NOT ATTAINED UNTO THE DAYS OF THE YEARS OF THE LIFE OF MY FATHERS IN THE DAYS IN WHICH THEY DWELT AS STRANGERS.

Jacob's answer to Pharaoh's question was bitter. Before discussing that, however, we must first ask why he believes that his life is short. In fact he will live another seventeen years and die at the age of one hundred and forty-seven. Though this is in fact somewhat shorter than the life of either Abraham or Isaac, it would at first appear to be a full and long life.

The brothers' second trip to Egypt was made during the second year of the famine (Gen. 45:6), and since Joseph sent his father a full year's supply of food in order to make the trip, we can suppose that the present conversation is taking place during the third year of famine. This being the case, the years of plenty began ten years prior to the present conversation, or in other words Jacob, who is now *one hundred and thirty* years old, was a hundred and twenty years old when Joseph was released from prison. As in the case of Abraham and Isaac, Jacob's life is fundamentally divided into two parts. One part was devoted to the New Way. The other was his private life (see commentary to Gen. 35:28). Jacob differs from his fathers in that his life of a hundred and twenty years was the part devoted to the New Way. Whatever was left for him as a private man was minor.

Jacob describes the major part of his life as the life of a *stranger*. This expression had come up before as a general description not only of his life but of the lives of Abraham and Isaac as well (Gen. 17:8, 28:4). And it will appear again in the Book of Exodus as a description of the lives of the fathers as a whole (Ex. 6:4).

The fathers, because they were fathers, lived only on a promise. According to the Biblical author's understanding of men and their ways, birth and maturation require time if anything of lasting quality is to result. We have seen this many times before, especially in the discussion of the importance of the numbers forty and four hundred (see commentary to Gen. 7:4 and 25:19). If we take a second look at the problem of tradition, this time from the point of view of the founder, memory becomes forethought and security becomes hope. The fathers are necessarily strangers because for them the past is dead and the future is still in the womb. In Jacob's case the life of the *stranger* was a particularly uneasy one. He had the difficult task of returning to Haran as a servant. In the commentary to Gen. 32:13 we discussed the dual nature of *the blessing*. At that point we began to see the significance of the fact that Jacob received only the lower blessing. He was the father who was forced to deal with the most painful problems connected with the establishment of a New Way. Much of his life had been spent in fear that the New Way could not be established without death. Both in the case of Esau and in the case of Joseph what seemed inevitable proved to be avoidable, but the fears had taken their toll on the old man's life.

#### 10. AND JACOB BLESSED PHARAOH, AND WENT OUT FROM BEFORE PHARAOH.

When we consider the *blessing* which Jacob gave to Pharaoh we must remember what *blessings* are and to whom they are given. The first blessing was given

to the fish (see Gen. 1:22 and commentary). Neither the sun nor the oxen are *blessed*: they have their own ways and always walk in them. *Blessings* are always ambiguous because they always imply a need for a *blessing*.

Since they always imply hope, the possibility that the hopes may not be completely fulfilled is ever present. This situation is clear in the case of Pharaoh, but that clarity serves only as a reminder of more general situations. The undertaking of the New Way as a whole was based on a *blessing*, and in fact human existence itself is founded on the *blessings* which were given to Man and Noah (Gen. 1:28, 5:2 and 9:1). In the commentary to Gen. 1:21 we noted that the word *blessing* replaced the words *being so*. If we look at that replacement in a more general context we can see its implications within our real task of trying to get a glimpse of the relation between the Bible and philosophy. For Plato and Aristotle the world was essentially intelligible and, as being knowable, demanded of itself that it produce a being capable of knowing it. Human existence was guaranteed even though its highest form might often be hidden in a dark corner and at times even be invisible. For our author that assurance must be replaced by a *blessing*. Although the Book of Genesis is intended to show the solidity of a well placed foundation, God's blessing will always be needed since no foundation which has been laid after Creation can achieve the security of nature in the Platonic and Aristotelian sense without it.

11. AND JOSEPH PLACED HIS FATHER AND HIS BRETHREN, AND GAVE THEM A POSSESSION IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, IN THE BEST OF THE LAND, IN THE LAND OF RAMESSES, AS PHARAOH HAD COMMANDED.

12. AND JOSEPH NOURISHED HIS FATHER, AND HIS BRETHREN, AND ALL HIS FATHER'S HOUSEHOLD, WITH BREAD, ACCORDING TO THEIR FAMILIES.

In the beginning of the present chapter we had seen the subtle play between Joseph and Pharaoh over the possession of the land of Goshen. When Joseph actually presented the land to his father, he, in accordance with the command of Pharaoh, presented it under the name of *Rameses*. So far as one can tell by the text *Rameses* and *Goshen* are geographically the same, but for the Biblical author no two countries could be further apart. Goshen was the comfortable womb for the new seed but Rameses was the place of enforced slavery. It was the city which the Hebrews were forced to build without straw (Ex. 1:11).

13. AND THERE WAS NO BREAD IN ALL THE LAND; FOR THE FAMINE WAS VERY SORE, SO THAT THE LAND OF EGYPT AND ALL THE LAND OF CANAAN FAINTED BY REASON OF THE FAMINE.

14. AND JOSEPH GATHERED UP ALL THE MONEY THAT WAS FOUND IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, AND IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, FOR THE CORN WHICH THEY BOUGHT: AND JOSEPH BROUGHT THE MONEY INTO PHARAOH'S HOUSE.

Prior to the time in which Joseph served as vizier, the position of the Egyptian Pharaohs was much weaker. The absolute power which Pharaoh has in the Book of Exodus had its origins in Joseph's economic policies. While there seems to be some historical foundation for the notion that these policies arose during the reign of the Hyksos<sup>1</sup> and were indeed the result of foreign rule, our present concern is over the author's reasons for attributing them to Joseph. But we cannot face this question until we have a better view of the policies themselves.

15. AND WHEN MONEY FAILED IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, AND IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, ALL THE EGYPTIANS CAME UNTO JOSEPH, AND SAID, GIVE US BREAD: FOR WHY SHOULD WE DIE IN THY PRESENCE? FOR THE MONEY FAILETH.
16. AND JOSEPH SAID, GIVE YOUR CATTLE; AND I WILL GIVE YOU FOR YOUR CATTLE, IF MONEY FAIL.
17. AND THEY BROUGHT THEIR CATTLE UNTO JOSEPH: AND JOSEPH GAVE THEM BREAD IN EXCHANGE FOR HORSES, AND FOR THE FLOCKS AND FOR THE CATTLE OF THE HERDS, AND FOR THE ASSES: AND HE FED THEM WITH BREAD FOR ALL THEIR CATTLE FOR THAT YEAR.
18. WHEN THAT YEAR WAS ENDED, THEY CAME UNTO HIM THE SECOND YEAR, AND SAID UNTO HIM, WE WILL NOT HIDE IT FROM MY LORD, NOW THAT OUR MONEY IS SPENT; MY LORD ALSO HATH OUR HERDS OF CATTLE; THERE IS NOT OUGHT LEFT IN THE SIGHT OF MY LORD, BUT OUR BODIES, AND OUR LANDS:
19. WHEREFORE SHALL WE DIE BEFORE THINE EYES, BOTH WE AND OUR LAND? BUY US AND OUR LAND FOR BREAD, AND WE AND OUR LAND WILL BE SERVANTS UNTO PHARAOH: AND GIVE US SEED, THAT WE MAY LIVE, AND NOT DIE, THAT THE LAND BE NOT DESOLATE.

Pharaoh has become the unquestionable master of Egypt, and Egypt has become a nation of slaves. The food which Joseph had gathered up was not to be given away but sold—first for money and cattle; then, when nothing else remained, the Egyptians sold their land and themselves.

There is a sense in which Professor Von Rad (p. 405) is correct when he says that the main point of the story is the gratitude of the Egyptian people towards Joseph, who regard him as their savior. He rightly condemns any use of this passage as "an arsenal of anti-Semitic polemic against the Old Testament." On that same level he is also justified in rejecting the notion that this passage is intended to show "a subtle ridicule of the all too submissive Egyptians who valued life more than freedom."

The problems, however, are somewhat more difficult than appear from Von Rad's account. In the commentary to Gen. 45:12 we saw that the Biblical author carefully presented the Egyptian people as noble, and often heroic, individuals. To that extent what Von Rad says is perfectly true, but in the eyes of the Biblical

1. Haim Z'ew Hirschberg: "Joseph," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, p. 208, Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1971.

author, nations and their ways become a means of discussing problems in a manner not so far from the way in which Socrates hypothesized the existence of the forms in order to get a better grasp of what is. If our suggestion that the Book of Genesis was addressed to those who came after the destruction of the kingdom is true, then the author could freely use countries in this way without injuring the living. In this sense we must take seriously the distinction between the economic and political organization which Joseph established in Egypt, and the economic and political policies inherent in the laws of Moses. We shall try to show that they are mirror images of one another.

20. AND JOSEPH BOUGHT ALL THE LAND OF EGYPT FOR PHARAOH; FOR THE EGYPTIANS SOLD EVERY MAN HIS FIELD, BECAUSE THE FAMINE PREVAILED OVER THEM: SO THE LAND BECAME PHARAOH'S.
21. AND AS FOR THE PEOPLE, HE TRANSFERRED THEM TO CITIES FROM ONE END OF THE BORDERS OF EGYPT EVEN TO THE OTHER END THEREOF.
22. ONLY THE LAND OF THE PRIESTS BOUGHT HE NOT; FOR THE PRIESTS HAD A PORTION ASSIGNED THEM OF PHARAOH. AND DID EAT THEIR PORTION WHICH PHARAOH GAVE THEM: WHEREFORE THEY SOLD NOT THEIR LANDS.

Verse Twenty-one, which has caused commentators and translators so much difficulty, is probably a reference to Gen. 41:48 in which Joseph stored his supplies in various cities throughout the country. Normally the verse is translated *He removed them to cities from one end of the borders of Egypt even to the other end thereof*. This translation would seem to imply that Joseph suddenly decided that all Egyptians should be city-dwellers. The more obvious interpretation would be to suppose that Joseph *transferred* the people who had come to him for food to the other cities where food was available. There is no implication that they would remain in the cities any longer than it would take them to fill up their sacks.

According to the laws of Egypt, Pharaoh was able to gain control of the whole land of Egypt with the exception of the lands held by the priests, which, by Egyptian law, could not be possessed. This law is in sharp contrast to the law of Moses, according to which the priests have no lands and are intended to be permanently dependent upon the people for their daily sustenance (Deut. 18:1).

Economically the situation in Egypt is a strange kind of parody of the economic system established for Israel. In neither case does land belong to individuals, as such. To that extent both are communal. Permanent ownership in Israel is a matter of family. That freedom proclaimed by the Jubilee Year is based on the notion that the land is an integral part of the family which lives on it. The national celebration of the joys of the Jubilee Year was a communal celebration for the dignity of individual families. Egyptian communality in this sense was the very opposite. All men lived together on a land which was owned by Pharaoh. Only the priests, who in Israel were eternally dependent, had autonomy in Egypt.

Once one considers Samuel's warning about the nature of a king and the effects of his reign upon the lives of the people he rules, one can see the dangers inherent in the close relationship between the economic systems of Egypt and Israel. Freedom, as inherent in the Jubilee Year, could so easily have degenerated into its close kin—the slavery of Egypt.

23. THEN JOSEPH SAID UNTO THE PEOPLE, BEHOLD, I HAVE BOUGHT YOU THIS DAY AND YOUR LAND FOR PHARAOH: LO, HERE IS SEED FOR YOU, AND YE SHALL SOW THE LAND.
24. AND IT SHALL COME TO PASS IN THE INCREASE, THAT YE SHALL GIVE THE FIFTH PART UNTO PHARAOH, AND FOUR PARTS SHALL BE YOUR OWN, FOR SEED OF THE FIELD, AND FOR YOUR FOOD, AND FOR THEM OF YOUR HOUSEHOLDS, AND FOR FOOD FOR YOUR LITTLE ONES.
25. AND THEY SAID, THOU HAST SAVED OUR LIVES: LET US FIND GRACE IN THE SIGHT OF MY LORD, AND WE WILL BE PHARAOH'S SERVANTS.
26. AND JOSEPH MADE IT A LAW OVER THE LAND OF EGYPT UNTO THIS DAY, THAT PHARAOH SHOULD HAVE THE FIFTH PART; EXCEPT THE LAND OF THE PRIESTS ONLY, WHICH BECAME NOT PHARAOH'S.

From a purely material point of view the economic system in Egypt was not very different from the situation in Israel. Joseph returned the use of the land to each man on the condition that one fifth of the yield be given to Pharaoh. In the case of Israel the amount to be given to the priests was one tenth, but that difference is perhaps not so important.

The fundamental difference lies only in each man's awareness of the fact that the land which he works belongs to his own family, and in the respect he has for the lands of the family of his neighbor. While in Egypt each man knew that he was working Pharaoh's land even though the material rewards might have been the same.

27. AND ISRAEL DWELT IN THE LAND OF EGYPT, IN THE COUNTRY OF GOSHEN; AND THEY HAD POSSESSIONS THEREIN, AND GREW, AND MULTIPLIED EXCEEDINGLY.
28. AND JACOB LIVED IN THE LAND OF EGYPT SEVENTEEN YEARS: SO THE WHOLE AGE OF JACOB WAS AN HUNDRED FORTY AND SEVEN YEARS.

The general significance of the number of years which Jacob lived was already discussed in the commentary to Gen. 47:9. One additional fact should, however, be pointed out. Jacob arrived in Egypt at the age of one hundred and thirty years, during the third year of the famine. Accordingly Jacob was one hundred and thirty-four years old when famine ceased to plague the land. He therefore continued to live in the land of Egypt for thirteen years after the famine had ceased. During that time he saw his family *grow and multiply exceedingly*. Even during the life of Jacob it became apparent that the return to the Promised Land

would not be as smooth as Joseph had planned, nor would it come about as quickly (see commentary to Gen. 45:3). Ironically, the growth and prosperity which apparently enticed them to remain in Goshen will return to plague them as the cause of the Pharaoh's anger years later:

*Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land. Therefore they did set over them taskmasters, to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Ra-amses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the Children of Israel. (Ex. 1:10–12)*

29. AND THE TIME DREW NIGH THAT ISRAEL MUST DIE: AND HE CALLED HIS SON JOSEPH AND SAID UNTO HIM, IF NOW I HAVE FOUND GRACE IN THY SIGHT, PUT, I PRAY THEE, THY HAND UNDER MY THIGH, AND DEAL KINDLY AND TRULY WITH ME; BURY ME NOT, I PRAY THEE, IN EGYPT:
30. BUT I WILL LIE WITH MY FATHERS, AND THOU SHALT CARRY ME OUT OF EGYPT, AND BURY ME IN THEIR BURYING PLACE. AND HE SAID, I WILL DO AS THOU HAST SAID.
31. AND HE SAID SWEAR UNTO ME. AND HE SWARE UNTO HIM. AND ISRAEL BOWED HIMSELF UPON THE BED'S HEAD.

On the importance of the form of the oath see the commentary to Gen. 24:1. Much of the final chapter of the book will be devoted to carrying Jacob back to the land of his fathers. During the whole of that passage we shall have to bear in mind the symbolism inherent in the word *to carry*, which we discussed at length in the commentary to Gen. 19:21. As we shall see, when the sons carry their father they do more than carry a dead body. Their *lifting* is the conscious human counterpart of God's act of *lifting* which forms one of the major threads of the book. By taking the body of their father upon their backs they symbolically take onto themselves the responsibility of maintaining the tradition which their father had set up.

Jacob's request has two parts. He not only wishes to be carried back to the Promised Land by his sons, but he also wishes to be buried there. In the commentaries to Gen. 35:4,8 we saw that burial also played a great role in the author's understanding of tradition and the formation of a people. Not all traditions are maintained solely by the conscious effort of those who maintain them. According to our author, ideas and feelings can sleep underground for many years and yet their seeds remain in the ways of the people, from whom they rise again. Jacob knew that the New Way which the fathers planted could only grow if the sons were willing to take on the burden. But he also knew that if the foundations were sufficiently well established they could outlast the insufficiencies of intervening generations.

## CHAPTER XLVIII

1. AND IT CAME TO PASS AFTER THESE THINGS, THAT ONE TOLD JOSEPH, BEHOLD, THY FATHER IS SICK: AND HE TOOK WITH HIM HIS TWO SONS, MANASSEH AND EPHRAIM,
2. AND ONE TOLD JACOB, AND SAID, BEHOLD, THY SON JOSEPH COMETH UNTO THEE: AND ISRAEL STRENGTHENED HIMSELF, AND SAT UPON THE BED.

The opening words of Chapter Forty-eight indicate its close relation to the last verse of Chapter Forty-seven. The precise meaning of Gen. 47:31, *And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head*, was obscure. However, Verse Two of the present chapter is clearly intended to be contrasted with it. When Jacob *strengthened himself and sat upon the bed* the author uses this contrast to portray the magnitude of human effort which Jacob put forth, thereby revealing the importance of the following chapter in the mind of Jacob.

3. AND JACOB SAID UNTO JOSEPH, GOD ALMIGHTY APPEARED UNTO ME AT LUZ IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, AND BLESSED ME,
4. AND SAID UNTO ME, BEHOLD, I WILL MAKE THEE FRUITFUL, AND MULTIPLY THEE, AND I WILL MAKE OF THEE A MULTITUDE OF PEOPLE AND WILL GIVE THIS LAND TO THY SEED AFTER THEE FOR AN EVERLASTING POSSESSION.

As was shown in the commentary to Gen. 17:1, *God Almighty* was not the God of a well-established nation but the God of a very few men who found themselves amongst strangers. As the chapter unfolds we shall see that Jacob intentionally used the words *God Almighty* in speaking with Joseph because of Joseph's tendency to believe that he himself had so well established the Way that there would no longer be a need for any radical change.

5. AND NOW THY SONS, EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH, WHICH WERE BORN UNTO THEE IN THE LAND OF EGYPT BEFORE I CAME UNTO THEE INTO EGYPT, ARE MINE: AS REUBEN AND SIMEON, THEY SHALL BE MINE.
6. AND THY ISSUE, WHICH THOU BEGETTEST AFTER THEM, SHALL BE THINE, AND SHALL BE CALLED AFTER THE NAME OF THEIR BRETHREN IN THEIR INHERITANCE.

There is a certain duality in Jacob's decision to adopt Ephraim and Manasseh. On the one hand, Joseph is honored by being the father of two tribes. But on the other hand, the final phrase clearly states that even if Joseph were to have another son there would still be no tribe of Joseph. Joseph's mastery of the art of magic would, in the eyes of Jacob, have become too overpowering, and he is therefore silently dropped.

This substitution, however, does not take place immediately. In the course of the Book of Exodus the tribe of Levi becomes singled out for special duty. It was listed in its normal place along with the other tribes in the beginning of that book. From that point on, Levi is normally treated separately from his brothers, but there are occasions when Levi is listed as one of the tribes. For instance, the tribe of Levi participates in the ceremony of the blessings and the curses in Deut. 27. Whenever such a thing occurs, the number of tribes is maintained by combining the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh into a single tribe referred to as the tribe of Joseph. In this sense the division of the tribe of Joseph into two tribes was intended to be a means of retaining the original division into twelve, given the fact that Levi was not destined to form a tribe in the geographical sense.

7. AND AS FOR ME, WHEN I CAME FROM PADAN, RACHEL DIED BY ME IN THE LAND OF CANAAN IN THE WAY, WHEN THERE WAS BUT A LITTLE WAY TO COME UNTO EPHRATH: AND I BURIED HER THERE IN THE WAY OF EPHRATH: THE SAME IS BETH-LEHEM.

The place of Rachel's burial, Bethlehem, is referred to by its old name, *Ephrath*. In Hebrew the words Ephrath and Ephraim are etymologically related and their generic forms turn out to be identical. In other words, the Hebrew word for a man from Ephraim is identical to the Hebrew word for a man from Ephrath, even though the English translation distinguishes between an Ephratite and an Ephraimite.

The city of Bethlehem is referred to as *Ephrath* in six passages in the bible. In Genesis it is connected with the death of Rachel three times (Gen. 35:16,19 and Gen. 48:7). Since it was the burial place of his grandmother, and has his name, one would have expected the city of Bethlehem to have fallen to the lot of Ephraim.

Elimelech, Naomi's husband, was described as an Ephratite, as was his most famous descendant, David (Ruth 1:2, 4:11 and I Sam. 17:12). The point of this confusion is that Joseph believes himself to be the leader of the New Way. From this it would follow that the leaders would be Ephratites. But irony is that the leaders will indeed be Ephratites, but instead of being the descendants of Ephraim, they will be the descendants of Judah from the city of Ephrath. In the last chapters we had begun to see the ascendancy of the House of Judah over the House of Joseph, and we shall see this development in greater detail in the course of the present chapter.

8. AND ISRAEL BEHELD JOSEPH'S SONS, AND SAID, WHO ARE THESE?

9. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, THEY ARE MY SONS, WHOM GOD HATH GIVEN ME IN THIS PLACE. AND HE SAID, BRING THEM, I PRAY THEE, UNTO ME, AND I WILL BLESS THEM.

10. NOW THE EYES OF ISRAEL WERE DIM FOR AGE, SO THAT HE COULD NOT SEE.

AND HE BROUGHT THEM NEAR UNTO HIM: AND HE KISSED THEM, AND EMBRACED THEM.

11. AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH, I HAD NOT THOUGHT TO SEE THY FACE: AND, LO, GOD HATH SHEWED ME ALSO THY SEED.
12. AND JOSEPH BROUGHT THEM OUT FROM BETWEEN HIS KNEES, AND HE BOWED HIMSELF WITH HIS FACE TO THE EARTH.
13. AND JOSEPH TOOK THEM BOTH, EPHRAIM IN HIS RIGHT HAND TOWARD ISRAEL'S LEFT HAND, AND MANASSEH IN HIS LEFT HAND TOWARD ISRAEL'S RIGHT HAND, AND BROUGHT THEM NEAR UNTO HIM.
14. AND ISRAEL STRETCHED OUT HIS RIGHT HAND, AND LAID IT UPON EPHRAIM'S HEAD, WHO WAS THE YOUNGER, AND HIS LEFT HAND UPON MANASSEH'S HEAD, GUIDING HIS HANDS WITTINGLY: FOR MANASSEH WAS THE FIRSTBORN.
15. AND HE BLESSED JOSEPH, AND SAID, GOD, BEFORE WHOM MY FATHERS ABRAHAM AND ISAAC DID WALK, THE GOD WHICH FED ME ALL MY LIFE LONG, UNTO THIS DAY,
16. THE ANGEL WHICH REDEEMED ME FROM ALL EVIL, BLESS THE LADS: AND LET MY NAME BE NAMED ON THEM AND THE NAME OF MY FATHERS ABRAHAM AND ISAAC: AND LET THEM GROW INTO A MULTITUDE IN THE MIDST OF THE EARTH.
17. AND WHEN JOSEPH SAW THAT HIS FATHER LAID HIS RIGHT UPON THE HEAD OF EPHRAIM, IT DISPLEASED HIM: AND HE HELD UP HIS FATHER'S HAND, TO REMOVE IT FROM EPHRAIM'S HEAD UNTO MANASSEH'S HEAD.
18. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS FATHER, NOT SO, MY FATHER: FOR THIS IS THE FIRSTBORN. PUT THY RIGHT HAND UPON HIS HEAD.
19. AND HIS FATHER REFUSED, AND SAID, I KNOW IT, MY SONS, I KNOW IT: HE ALSO SHALL BECOME A PEOPLE, AND HE ALSO SHALL BE GREAT: BUT TRULY HIS YOUNGER BROTHER SHALL BE GREATER THAN HE, AND HIS SEED SHALL BECOME A MULTITUDE OF NATIONS.

Israel's decision to reverse the order of his sons had apparently been made even before he met them. He insisted upon placing the younger before the elder, even before he got to know them. His decision, therefore, could not have been made on the basis of merit. Joseph, that great magician who nourished his brothers in Egypt and was praised by all, assumed that the blessing would go to his eldest son. That, after all, is the way things work in a smooth and well-running society which has already been fully established. Joseph, in this sense, considers himself to be the last great founder. He assumed that from that point on nothing was left other than to follow the way which he had set. But Jacob was wiser and knew that permanence had not yet been achieved.

The words *displeased* and *refused* are quite strong. Perhaps the most intriguing facet of the situation is the reversal in the relationship which one normally sees in fathers and sons. Joseph, the son, precisely because he considers himself to be the last founder, has suddenly become the conservative, whereas the old man has seen the necessity for renewal.

20. AND HE BLESSED THEM THAT DAY, SAYING, IN THEE SHALL ISRAEL BLESS. SAYING, GOD MAKE THEE AS EPHRAIM AND AS MANASSEH: AND HE SET EPHRAIM BEFORE MANASSEH.

The selection of Ephraim over Manasseh seems to have been only temporary. In the commentary to Gen. 15:9 we showed that the Books of Joshua and Judges formed a whole and that their story was the story of the decline of the house of Ephraim, which terminated with the rise of Judah. After the death of Moses, Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim, was chosen leader. After his death the leadership remained in the hands of Ephraim. Even after the death of Joshua, Ephraim continued to play a central role. Ehud, though himself a Benjamite, gathered the people in the mountains of Ephraim to begin the war which liberated them from the Moabites (Judg. 3:15,27). These mountains were also the home of Deborah (Judg. 4:5). In the commentary to Gen. 15:9, we discussed the deference which the next leader, Gideon, paid to the tribe of Ephraim, as well as the final insult to Ephraim during the leadership of Jephtha. Next, as we remember, came the rise of Micah the Ephraimite and his private sanctuary, as well as the story of the Levite from Ephraim whose experience in the city of Gibeon forced the author, almost against his will, to repeat the line which summed up the conclusion of the book: *In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes* (Judg. 21:25).

The temporary nature of Ephraim's ascendancy over Manasseh had already become apparent in the Torah itself. Moses took a census of the people when he left Egypt and again at the end of his journey. In the first census, Ephraim's name appears before Manasseh's, and it was the larger. Ephraim had 40,500 people (Num. 1:32) and Manasseh 32,200 (Num. 1:34). By the end of the journey Ephraim had dropped to 31,500 (Num. 26:37), whereas Manasseh had reached 52,700 (Num. 27:34). The ascendancy of Manasseh became even more evident when the tribe joined Jephtha's army in spite of Jephtha's insult to Ephraim. Ultimately, there was a direct war between Manasseh and Ephraim in which Manasseh was victorious (Judg. 12:5). The Biblical author is not particularly interested in Manasseh as such at this point but rather wishes to emphasize the fall of Ephraim. The situation, however, was not stable, and Ephraim was able to regain the leadership once again under Samuel, an Ephraimite. But in the context of the book as a whole, it becomes evident that Samuel's descendants were not able to maintain the stability government requires. Samuel therefore only became the means for the establishment of the kingship under the rule of the tribe of Judah. This delicate balance between the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Ephraim will come up again in the commentary to Gen. 49:10.

Jacob's final blessing to Joseph is that his house would be so prosperous that when the Children of Israel wish to bless anyone the blessing would be *God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh*. The only line in the Bible which is reminiscent of this verse appears in the Book of Ruth. The passage reads as follows:

*And all the people that were in the gates, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that has come into thine house like Rachel and Leah, which two did build the house of Israel; and do thou worthily in Ephrath, be thou famous in Bethlehem: and let thy house be as the house of Peretz, whom Tamar bore to Judah of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of the young woman (Ruth 4:11–12).*

In these verses not only does one find the intriguing interplay between Ephraim and Ephrath which was discussed in the commentary to Verse Seven, but more importantly the son of Judah has replaced the sons of Joseph in the blessing.

21. AND ISRAEL SAID UNTO JOSEPH, BEHOLD, I DIE: BUT GOD SHALL BE WITH YOU AND BRING YOU AGAIN UNTO THE LAND OF YOUR FATHERS.

22. MOREOVER, I HAVE GIVEN TO THEE ONE PORTION ABOVE THY BRETHREN, WHICH I TOOK OUT OF THE HAND OF THE AMORITE WITH MY SWORD AND WITH MY BOW.

The word which is translated *portion* is totally obscure. The normal translation is *shoulder*, and in no other passage does it vary from that meaning. The context would certainly demand something like the word *portion*, but even if there had been such an obscure usage at the time of the writing of the Bible, it would be necessary to account for its use in this passage. The word for *portion* is identical to the Hebrew name of the city of Shechem. This was the city in which Hamor was killed and to which Jacob had originally sent Joseph believing that he would be killed by his brothers, and Joseph's bones will, in fact, ultimately be buried in that city (Josh. 24:32).

Jacob concludes the chapter, in which he destroyed the tribe of Joseph as such, by presenting Joseph with a *Shechem* in connection with his brothers. By returning him to Shechem he metaphorically brings up the problem of filicide once again. Nonetheless there is a great difference between Joseph and Kronos. But perhaps even more relevant than the Greek myth is the filicide which takes place in the Babylonian myth of the Emunah-Elish. The older gods complained that the children made too much noise and ate them in order that the being of the world might not be disturbed. Insofar as any like activity plays a role in this passage the goals seem to be almost the very opposite. It comes extremely late in the story and is done for the sake of maintaining the possibility of growth and change.

The final words of the chapter, *which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow*, are clearly intended to refer to Josh. 24:12, which reads as follows: *And I sent the hornet before you which drove them out from before you, even the two Kings of the Amorites; but not with thy sword and not with thy bow.* Since the words *sword* and *bow* are not commonly used together as an idiom in the Bible, their occurrence at this point, together with the reference to the Amorites, makes it certain that the reference was intentional.

The *two Kings of the Amorites*, who had already been referred to by those same words in a parallel passage in Deuteronomy 3:8, are Og and Sihon (see Deut. 3:1–10). These two kings, who were spoken of in the commentary to Gen. 15:9, ruled the Amorites who lived in the captured provinces east of the Jordan River. Their lands were inherited by half the tribe of Manasseh. This conquest had two results. On the one hand, the fame of this battle caused many of the Canaanites who lived on the western shore to capitulate without battle. But the resulting division of the state into two parts, and the great distance between Manasseh and the Tabernacle, was one of the major causes of the fall of the Jubilee Year.

If we compare the passage in Genesis with the passage from Joshua more closely the real problems begin to emerge. According to Joshua, God said to the people of Joshua's day that they had taken the Amorites, but *not with thy sword, nor with thy bow*. This statement is compatible with Jacob's claim that he himself had captured those lands with his *sword and bow*. But what are we to make of the claim itself? At first it sounds a bit wild, and yet Jacob seems to have given it some thought. May it not be understood in the following sense: by making an extra tribe Jacob, as it were, increased the population as a whole. As a result, the borders of the Promised Land were no longer sufficient, and it was metaphorically determined at this moment that the eastern provinces would be needed.

## CHAPTER XLIX

1. AND JACOB CALLED UNTO HIS SONS, AND SAID, GATHER YOURSELVES TOGETHER THAT I MAY TELL YOU THAT WHICH SHALL BEFALL YOU IN THE LAST DAYS.
2. GATHER YOURSELVES TOGETHER, AND HEAR, YE SONS OF JACOB: AND HEARKEN UNTO ISRAEL YOUR FATHER.

Chapter Forty-nine is undoubtedly the most obscure chapter in the Book of Genesis. Jacob's short speeches to his sons, which are often wrongly referred to as blessings, purport to be brief and poetic statements concerning the future life of each tribe, which Jacob calls *the last days*. This commentary makes no pretense of having completely understood these rather cryptic passages but will try to shed some light wherever it can.

3. REUBEN, THOU ART MY FIRSTBORN, MY MIGHT, AND THE BEGINNING OF MY STRENGTH, THE EXCELLENCY OF DIGNITY, AND THE EXCELLENCY OF POWER:
4. UNSTABLE AS WATER, THOU SHALT NOT EXCEL: BECAUSE THOU WENTEST UP TO THY FATHER'S BED; THEN DEFILEDST THOU IT: HE WENT UP TO MY COUCH.

The Book of Exodus ended with the installation of Aaron as High Priest, and Leviticus gave the details concerning his office. The Book of Numbers concerns life in the desert and the conquest of the eastern provinces. It began when Moses

took the census of the people at Sinai. A second census was given after the war with Og and Sihon. In order to understand the story of Reuben we must begin by comparing the results of the two censuses.

<i>Tribe</i>	<i>Census in Num. Chap. 1</i>	<i>Census in Num. Chap. 26</i>
Reuben	46,500	43,730
Simeon	59,300	22,200
Levi	22,000	—
Judah	74,600	76,500
Dan	62,700	64,400
Naphtali	53,400	45,400
Gad	45,650	40,500
Asher	41,500	53,400
Issachar	54,400	64,300
Zebulun	57,400	60,500
Benjamin	35,400	45,600
Manasseh	32,200	52,700
Ephraim	40,500	32,500

Reuben was Jacob's first-born. In the early days, when the brothers were all mentioned his name always appeared first on the list. That was true when they met their uncle Esau (Gen. 35:25) and when the official list of Jacob's sons was given (Gen. 46:8). In the later books that will continue to be the case. At the very beginning of the Book of Exodus a list will be given of the *souls that came out of Canaan* with Jacob, and again Reuben's name will appear first. The Book of Numbers begins in the same way (Num. 1:5), but when the tribes are lined up for marching through the desert one chapter later, Judah's name will suddenly emerge at the top of the list (Num. 2:3).

In the Book of Genesis, Reuben often tries to be the leader of his brothers, but in each case he fails. His plan to save Joseph was a bad one (see Gen. 37:21,29; 42:22 and commentaries). His attempt to persuade Jacob to send Benjamin was ill-timed and grotesque in spite of his good will (Gen. 42:37). One of his descendants, On, was active in the revolution under Korah, presumably because of his ancient claim as the first-born (Num. 16:1 and commentary to Gen. 20:1).

Although the establishment of the two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, which replaced the tribe of Joseph, was one of the chief causes in establishing the need for the eastern provinces, it is not sufficient to account for Reuben's actions. Apparently, we are to assume that Reuben's decision to remain apart from his brothers on the other side of the Jordan was rooted in his loss of the rights of the first-born. As we described in the commentary to Gen. 15:9, the complex of events following that decision led to the building of an independent altar and ultimately to the collapse of the Jubilee Year.

The words *the beginning of my strength* are clearly intended to be a reference

to Deut. 21:15–17. The full context makes it clear that this reference was made consciously.

*15. If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: 16. Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn. 17. But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. (Deut. 21:15–17)*

Insofar as Jacob had decided to replace Reuben by Joseph, his actions were clearly against the law as stated in Deuteronomy. By adopting Ephraim and Manasseh he has quite literally given a double portion to the son of his most beloved wife, Rachel. One way of justifying his actions would be to point to the fact that the law had not yet been given. In Biblical terms, however, such an excuse might appear to be insufficient because the Bible presupposes a pre-legal distinction between good and bad which we discussed in connection with Cain. But this argument would not hold true in the case of a law the need for which is predicated on the existence of law in general. The supremacy of the first-born is the most orderly means of maintaining law once that law has been established, but at this point the New Way, i.e. the way of law, is not fully determined. This openness allowed Jacob the possibility of making certain decisions which would no longer be possible when stability became of greater importance.

Thus far in the commentary we have presented the replacement of Reuben by Joseph, and ultimately by Judah, in terms of Reuben's ineptness. However, Jacob presents it in terms of Reuben's affair with Bilhah. The two are connected in the following manner. As first-born, it was Reuben's task to replace his father as leader. In his bungling way he did so, but his actions were untimely and inept. This characteristic, which we have already seen in his attempt to rescue Joseph and in the inept manner in which he tried to convince his father to let them take Benjamin to Egypt with them, is what Jacob described as *unstable as water*.

5. SIMEON AND LEVI ARE BRETHREN; INSTRUMENTS OF CRUELTY ARE IN THEIR HABITATIONS.
6. O MY SOUL, COME NOT THOU INTO THEIR SECRET; UNTO THEIR ASSEMBLY, MINE HONOUR, BE NOT THOU UNITED: FOR IN THEIR ANGER THEY SLEW A MAN, AND IN THEIR SELFWILL THEY MAIM OXEN.
7. CURSED BE THEIR ANGER, FOR IT WAS FIERCE; AND THEIR WRATH, FOR IT WAS CRUEL: I WILL DIVIDE THEM IN JACOB, AND SCATTER THEM IN ISRAEL.

Simeon and Levi are treated as one in spite of the fact that their fates were almost directly opposite from one another. When Jacob calls them *brothers* he clearly has in mind their rashness and the grave injustices which that led to after the marriage of Dinah in Chapter Thirty-five. Simeon's fate was total obscurity.

No men of importance came from the tribe of Simeon, and most of the men of that tribe settled within the borders of Judah. Of the sixteen cities which were granted to Simeon in the Book of Joshua, all but five of them were also listed among the cities granted to the tribe of Judah (compare Josh. 19:1–9 with Josh. 15:20–62).

Before the settlement of the land, Simeon numbered 59,300—more than any tribe with the exceptions of Judah and Dan. At the end of the book, that number had fallen to 22,200—less than any other tribe. By the end of the Book of Deuteronomy the tribe appears to have no independent existence whatsoever, and hence it is the only tribe which does not even receive a blessing from Moses just before his death (Deut. Chap. 33).

The tribe of Levi on the other hand became the most distinctive tribe. This distinction began at the outset of the Book of Exodus, when an unnamed Levite bore a son named Moses (Ex. 2:1). Moses' lineage is of some importance. However, Moses was merely an individual man, and his importance does not necessarily imply any special distinction granted to the tribe of Levi as a whole.

After the sons of Israel had escaped the armies of Pharaoh they were met by Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, a Midianite priest. During his stay, Jethro convinced Moses that his people were in need of judges and written law. Up till that point Moses had judged the people by himself. In the commentary to Gen. 25:1 we discussed the implications of the fact that the need for law was seen by a foreigner in terms of human reason alone, and that only after this need became visible were laws given by God. The origin of priesthood, however, is much less clear. Apparently the notion of a priest also arose because of Jethro, who was himself a Midianite priest. At any rate, shortly after Jethro left, a group of people known as *the priests* were mentioned for the first time, and certain duties were placed upon them (Ex. 19:22). Aaron had of course spoken for Moses in front of Pharaoh on several occasions, but there was as yet no indication of any need for priests. The complicated events which led to the decision to form a tribe of priests were discussed in the commentary to Gen. 15:9. In that same commentary we mentioned the fact that Aaron's sons were then given the priesthood as a perpetual inheritance. However, Nadab and Abihu, having inherited Levi's rashness, were incapable of any relation to God which did not lead to irrational action, and for that reason they were killed in the height of their ecstasies.

The Levites as a whole were not as yet singled out for any particular purpose. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the law, the people persuaded Aaron to build the Golden Calf. On his return, Moses discovered what had happened, and punishment was swift. He called for the assistance of anyone who would help him to punish their brothers, and the tribe of Levi came forward (Ex. 32:26). At that time, one could begin to see the relation between Simeon and Levi. The irrational anger which both of them displayed could only have been dealt with in one of two ways. They had either to be abolished as a tribe or to be given a position to which that anger could be tamed and endowed with noble purpose.

After the affair of the Golden Calf, neither the Levites nor the priests are seen again in the Book of Exodus until the very end of the book, and yet all of the intervening chapters are centered around them. Six of those chapters are devoted to the intricate laws concerning the Tabernacle, Aaron's vestment, and the accoutrements of his office. The rest of the book is devoted to the labors and gifts which the people brought to honor Aaron. At the very end of the book, Aaron, who had not been seen since the episode of the Golden Calf, emerged as the glorious High Priest.

The Book of Numbers, however, tells a very different story. According to this account the tribe of Levi was consecrated to the services of the Tabernacle as a duty which Israel owed in partial payment, or at least as compensation, for the death of the Egyptian children (for more details see the commentary to Gen. 22:19).

The commentary to Gen. 20:1 described the immediate results of the special position which was given to Aaron and his sons. Korah became the leader of a dissident faction within the Levites, and open revolt broke out. After the revolution was quelled and Aaron's position secured, further revolution was prevented by inventing a higher position for the other Levites.

The new office of priest, however, was a heavy burden and came at a great price. Aaron's high position meant that he was responsible for the people as a whole. Chapter Eighteen of Numbers begins as follows: *And the Lord said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall bear the iniquity of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall bear the iniquity of your priesthood* (Num. 18:1). We have already begun to see the anger of Levi and its relation to the priesthood. The duality of the highest and the lowest within the priesthood itself is in large measure the iniquity which the preceding verse describes, but it does not account for the whole of it. After the death of Miriam two chapters later, the people again revolted, this time over the lack of water. God appeared to Moses and told him to take his rod and speak to the rock, which would then gush forth water. In his impatience Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it. The water came, but the following verse reads: *And the Lord spoke unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye have believed Me not to sanctify Me in the eyes of Israel, therefore, ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them* (Num. 20:12).

Though Aaron was innocent in this case, the end of the chapter reads as follows:

*24. Aaron shall be gathered unto his people; for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the Children of Israel, because ye rebelled against My word at the water of Meribah. 25. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them unto Mount Hor: 26. And strip Aaron of his garments and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. 27. And Moses did as the Lord commanded; and they went up into the mountain Hor in the sight of all the congregation. 28. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon*

*Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. 29. And when all the congregations saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron for thirty days, even all the house of Israel. (Num. 20:24–29)*

In Verse Twenty-six nothing is mentioned about the mysterious cause of Aaron's death, and the reader is left to wonder how he died.

One of the great tasks of the high priest was to lead the people in battle (Deut. 18.1), but Eleazar never fulfilled that function. After his son, Phinehas, killed Kozbi (Num. 26:1), Eleazar helped Moses to quiet the people by taking a census, and he took charge of the booty after the Midianite war (Num. 31:12). He was also consulted when Reuben and Gad came forward with their requests to occupy the lands east of the Jordan (Num. 32:2). But whenever there was violence, such as the death of Kozbi or the war against the Midianites, Eleazar retired, and Phinehas, his son, took his place. Eleazar was not a true son of Levi. He was not a violent or passionate man and would have nothing to do with war or death after the death of his father.

There were 400 years between the death of Joshua and the end of the Book of Judges. During that time the priests played no role. The author emphasizes this in a most fantastic way. At the end of the Book of Judges, when the Children of Israel decide to attack the Children of Benjamin for their outrages against the concubine of the Levite from Ephraim, the high priest who led the army was Phinehas, *the son of Eleazar* (Judg. 20:28). Perhaps the author endowed Phinehas with such longevity in order to remind us that there were no other priests living at the time of the Judges whom he had forgotten to mention. Perhaps it was his irascibility that kept him alive, and perhaps it is that irascibility which makes tradition work.

Even before Aaron emerged in his priestly garments at the end of the Book of Exodus, God had announced that he and his sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar were to *bear the iniquity of the hallowed things* (Ex. 28:1,38). However, their garments were to keep them from death (Ex. 28:42,43).

One sense in which they were to *bear the iniquity* was by eating the meat of the sacrificial offerings. This was a serious duty, and Moses became angry when Aaron refused to eat the sacrifice which Nadab and Abihu had made before they died in front of the Lord for having burned strange fires (Lev. 10:17). The term *bear the iniquity of the people* is also used for the scapegoat (Lev. 16:22). Aaron was likened to the scapegoat and was to die for something that he did not do. He was divested of the clothes that were to protect him and died on the mountain where he had gone with Moses and Eleazar. Aaron, like the scapegoat who was sacrificed, fulfilled his task as the one who *bears the iniquity of the people*. From that moment on Eleazar could no longer bear the sight of violence, and one is left to wonder whether his distaste for violence may not have come from whatever it was he saw or did on the mountain from which Aaron, his father, never returned.

Individual Levites and priests play various roles in the latter books, but we seem to have enough here to understand Jacob's speech. The words *maim oxen* refer to the Levites' role in sacrifice. The tribe of Simeon disappeared, and the Levites inherited no land but lived in cities throughout the country. *Simeon and Levi were brothers*—each in his own way was *divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel*.

8. JUDAH, THOU ART HE WHOM THY BRETHREN SHALL PRAISE; THY HAND SHALL BE IN THE NECK OF THINE ENEMIES: THY FATHER'S CHILDREN SHALL BOW DOWN BEFORE THEE.
9. JUDAH IS A LION'S WHELP; FROM THE PREY, MY SON, THOU ART GONE UP: HE STOOPED DOWN, HE COUCHED AS A LION, AND AS AN OLD LION; WHO SHALL ROUSE HIM UP?

Verse Eight refers primarily to the kingship of the House of Judah, but it also refers to the dreams which Joseph had in Chapter Thirty-seven. Joseph, the great interpreter of dreams, seems to have misinterpreted his own dreams. The sheaf which stood in the center while the other sheaves *bowed down before* it was not his own; it was Judah's.

*Judah is a lion's whelp*: the symbol of the lion is a constant theme in the books. In Balaam's blessing it symbolizes Israel's ability to conquer the new land (Num. 24:9), but Moses, in his blessings (Deut. 33:22), ascribes the *lion's whelp* to Dan rather than to Judah. Presumably the young lion Moses had in mind was the Danite, Samson, who was the first in a series of men from Israel to slay a lion. He killed a lion with his bare hands one day on his way to Timnath seeking a Philistine wife. Sometime later he found the lion, and in the meantime some bees had made their nest in the carcass, leaving it filled with honey. Now the Philistines were famed for riddling, and so Samson at his wedding feast proposed to the Philistines the following riddle: *Out of the eater came the edible, and out of the strong came forth sweetness* (Judg. 14:14).

Samson's riddle is the riddle of the book. How can the *sweet come forth from the strong*? That question has been plaguing us throughout the book. How can radically imperfect beginnings lead to justice? We saw this in the rise of kingship and the rise of sacrifice. We saw it in Cain's first city, and we saw it in the ground that could not grass. Samson's error was in asking the Philistines. They were the wild men who knew the secret of the Ark, and they were the source of much of David's wisdom. By trickery they were able to discover the secret of Samson's riddle.

Samson conquered his lion, but his battle was a private battle just as Samson was a private hero. He turned out to be a false start, in the same sense in which Saul was a false start in the rise of kingship. The true lion, Judah, reacted to Samson in the same way in which the first Judah handled his father Jacob. They saw that times were not right and decided to bind Samson and turn him over to

the Philistines rather than risk a fatal war fought at the wrong moment (Judg. 15:10).

The true hero, who killed his lion at a young age, was David, the shepherd, who went on to kill Goliath in that charming story retold in the commentary to Gen. 14:5. Once David had killed his lion, it truly became the symbol of Judah.

After David came Benaiah, the man who *killed a lion in the snow* (II Sam. 23:20). He was the hero David put over the Cherethites and Pelethites, men of the sea who fought for Israel, and he was the one who replaced Joab under Solomon. *Out of the eater came the edible*—by killing a lion one first becomes a lion and then a tamer of lions.

David's son tamed his lions in another way. There were lions on the brim of the *molten sea* which stood in front of Solomon's Temple and contained the waters of ablution (I Kings 7:29,36). Kingship became a great lavabo holding within it the primordial waters, in their double sense, which could rain down chaos or bring purification. Lions also adorned Solomon's throne (I Kings 10:19,20).

For David and Solomon the symbol of the lion became complicated. In the case of David it was a wild animal that could be conquered and used as a symbol. David, we must remember, largely gained his education about order and ruling in the days he spent with the Philistines in Ziklag. Samson tried to teach the Philistines with his riddle, but David and Solomon answered the riddle by learning from them.

In the commentary to Gen. 35:2 we described the double significance of water—its relation to chaos and its relation to cleansing. Only lions could contain these chaotic waters and make them available to man. Each man cleansed himself in the *molten sea*, but as for the whole, lions adorned King Solomon's throne.

In the commentary to Gen. 20:7 we quoted and discussed at length the story of the *man of God* and the *old prophet*. The *man of God* was the young man who foretold the reunification of the nation, but did not see how much time would be required before that reunification would become possible. He was killed by the kindly lion who patiently stood guard over his body until the Old Prophet came. This lion, too, was the lion of Judah. The lion of Judah also killed the man who would not help the prophet teach Ahab (see I Kings 20:36 and commentary to Gen. 31:45).

After that reunification, when the Babylonians finally returned to conquer the land, they sent in foreign peoples to diversify and weaken local practices.

*And the King of Assyria brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria, instead of the Children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof. And so it was, at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the Lord; therefore the Lord sent lions among them, which slew some of them. Wherefore they spake to the King of Assyria, saying, The nations which thou hast removed, and*

*placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the Land: therefore He hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the Land. (II Kings 17:24–26)*

Judah had accepted exile, but when other men with other ways and other memories tried to make live that which could only live in memory the old lion returned in the only way that remained.

Two stages of Judah's life are described in Verse Nine—the young lion and the old one. The first stage is described as a *couching*. It is the same word which was used for the *sin* which *couched* at Cain's door (Gen. 4:7). The modern tendency to translate *crouched*, as if sin were ready to spring, will not quite do because the word can be used for a bird resting gently on its young (Deut. 22:6). It is also sometimes used to describe the *deep*, but in every context in which the word *couched* is used with reference to the Deep it is described as the well of the goods of the earth rather than the home of chaotic waters. In the first stage of his life, Judah was patient and waited for the proper time, and his sons did the same. They were the first to begin the conquest of the land under their own power in the beginning of the Book of Judges, but once things went awry, no member of that tribe ever became a Judge. The tribe simply waited, while chaos surrounded them everywhere, and did nothing. When Saul became king they seemed to have placed even a greater distance between themselves and the other tribes. Although they participated in Israel's wars after Saul's ascension to the throne, the author begins to distinguish between Israel and Judah. *And when he numbered them in Bezek the Children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand (I Sam. 11:8)*. The same distinction is made in I Sam. 15:4 during the battle against the Amalekites and again in I Sam. 17:52 during the war against the Philistines. In none of these cases is there any rift between Israel and Judah, and yet the fact that the text distinguishes them seems to imply that Judah held itself at some distance from the others until the time of David, the *old lion*.

10. THE SCEPTRE SHALL NOT DEPART FROM JUDAH, NOR A LAWGIVER FROM BETWEEN HIS FEET, UNTIL SHILOH COME; AND UNTO HIM SHALL THE GATHERING OF THE PEOPLE BE:

Shiloh first became important at the time of Joshua, when lots were drawn to see which lands were to be apportioned to each tribe. It remained the seat of the Ark and the center of the New Way during the lives of Eli and Samuel. After the rise of kingship the center of the New Way left Shiloh, and its importance became a dead issue when King Solomon relieved Abiathar of his offices (I Kings 2:27).

The present verse clearly states that the descendants of Judah will rule over the whole of Israel *until Shiloh comes*. The translation of these words has often been mangled and the texts corrupted by translators who did not understand them. The verse indicates that the House of Judah will not rule the complete

kingdom forever. The House of Judah did in fact lose its control over the whole when Ahijah *came*. Ahijah, whose full story will be retold in the commentary to Verse Sixteen, came from Shiloh, and *unto him there was a gathering of the people* who, by virtue of Ahijah's prophecy, gathered around King Jeroboam, the first rebel king of the North.

11. TETHERING HIS ASS'S COLT UNTO THE VINE AND THE SON OF HIS SHE ASS  
UNTO THE TENDRILS: HE WASHED HIS GARMENTS IN WINE, AND HIS CLOTHES  
IN THE BLOOD OF GRAPES:

12. HIS EYES SHALL BE RED WITH WINE, AND HIS TEETH WHITE WITH MILK.

In Hebrew there are four words for an ass, coming from four different roots. They are respectively the *wild ass*, the *ass*, the *she-ass*, and the *colt*. We have dealt at some length with the *wild ass*, but the time has come to speak of his tamed brother.

The ass is essentially a beast of burden. David introduced horses into the New Way, and his men sometimes rode on mules (II Sam. 13:29). But the traditional beast of burden in Israel was the ass.

It is often mentioned as part of a man's wealth. Pharaoh gave some to Abram (Gen. 12:16), and Abraham's slave brought some to Rebekah (Gen. 24:35). It was one of the beasts with which Jacob provided himself before leaving Haran (Gen. 34:28), and asses were also subject to the plagues in Egypt (Ex. 9:3). In their journeys the sons of Israel captured the asses of Shechem, from whom they inherited the notion of kingship, and their descendants captured the asses of the Midianites, who taught them the necessity of law, but destroyed the asses of Jericho and of Amalek (Gen. 35:28; Num. 31:34; Josh. 6:21; Judg. 6:4).

Asses are singled out because of their special closeness to man. Each man is responsible for the well-being of an ass, even if it belongs to a man who hates him.

*If thou see the ass of him that hateth thee lying under his burden, and wouldest forbear to help him, thou shalt surely help with him. (Ex. 23:5)*

Normally, the first-born of any animal was sacrificed to the Lord, but the ass was the only animal who, like the first child of a man, could be redeemed with a lamb (Ex. 13:13).

We are not told how Moses left Egypt, but when he came back to become leader of his people he returned riding an ass (Ex. 4:20). Saul once went out looking for some she-asses, but found Samuel and became King of Israel instead (I Sam. 9:3).

Although Saul never found his asses, David, the killer of lions, set out from his father's house riding an ass and became the true king (I Sam. 16:20).

The present passage is by no means the only time that the ass and the lion appear together. Samson, who killed a lion with his bare hands, later smote the Phi-

listines with a jawbone of an ass. As we remember he was the private hero who never became king.

Samuel warned the people that if they were to appoint a king he would take their asses (I Sam. 8:16), but both he and Moses argued that they were just leaders because they did not take them (Num. 16:15 and I Sam. 12:3).

Asses were once again connected with lions when Ahithophel, Absalom's counselor who could not face the lions, rode home on an ass to commit suicide (II Sam. 17:23).

Those who pretend to power sometimes ride asses also. That was true of Balaam, who rode a she-ass (Num. 22:21), of Ziba, and of Sheba ben Bichri (II Sam. 16:1; I Kings 2:40).

Asses were the beasts of burden; one of them carried Abraham's wood to the foot of Mount Moriah, and Isaac carried it the rest of the way. They were closely associated with the sons of Jacob and pulled the wagons which carried Jacob's body back to Canaan (Gen. 42:26–27; 43:18,24; 44:3,13; 45:23).

The central reference is the ass who carried the young *man of God* and who stood together with the lion guarding his body (I Kings 13:24).

Jacob's words to his son went as follows: *Tethering his ass's colt unto the vine and the son of his she ass unto the tendrils.*

Judah was an old lion—that much has already been established—but who is his ass, that slow and steady beast of burden, dumb but sure-footed, who patiently plods on? They were the children bought with a lamb, who lifted the weight of their father onto their backs to be buried deep in the soil of an unconquered land.

*The vine, father of forgetfulness, there the lion tethered the colt and washed its garment in wine, in the blood of grapes he washed its clothes free from the blood of man. From Aaron's calf to Solomon's house, the sweet comes forth from the strong. From the land of blood to the land of wine and milk these two would go. But now they wait, guarding over the young man who did not know time.*

13. ZEBULUN SHALL DWELL AT THE HAVEN OF THE SEA; AND HE SHALL BE FOR AN HAVEN OF SHIPS; AND HIS BORDER SHALL BE UNTO ZIDON.

The men of Zebulun began life as heroes. They were of great importance in the wars of Barak and Gideon, as well as the battle of Aijalon (Judg. 4:6,10; 6:35 and 12:11,12), and they were one of the first tribes to complete the conquest of their lands. Quite often, it is said of other tribes that they *dwelled among the Canaanites*. In the case of Zebulun the phrase is reversed: *and the Canaanites dwell among them* (Judg. 1:30), showing that they were at least in control of the land.

Zidon was one of the sons of Canaan (Gen. 10:15,19) and was to have been part of the inheritance of the tribe of Asher according to the list of cities given in the Book of Joshua. However, Asher was never able to complete the conquest (Judg. 1:31).

The Zidonites were never conquered, and presumably they remained as one of the *nations which the Lord left to test Israel by them, that is, all in Israel who had no experience of any war in Canaan* (Judg. 3:1).

In later times Zidon provided the lumber which was used for building the Temple. Her king, Hiram, became closely allied with King Solomon. But Solomon's dealings with Hiram eventually became much too expensive, and the resulting over-taxation to a large extent caused the fall of the House of Judah (see commentary to Gen. 31:45). At the end of his life Solomon also built idols to the gods of the Zidonites, which were destroyed only at the very end when the state was reunified by King Josiah (II Kings 23:13).

Zidon was, of course, the country which is often referred to as Phoenicia. She was a great maritime nation. Apparently Zebulun was able to learn the art of sailing from her without any great loss. However, the text indicates that the same is not true of his brother, Issachar.

14. ISSACHAR IS A STRONG ASS COUCHING DOWN BETWEEN TWO BURDENS:

15. AND HE SAW THAT REST WAS GOOD, AND THE LAND THAT IT WAS PLEASANT;  
AND BOWED HIS SHOULDER TO BEAR, AND BECAME A SERVANT UNTO TRIBUTE.

Aside from one bad king named Baasha and an unimportant judge named Tola, Issachar can only be remembered for its riches, but apparently it was not able to face the problem of wealth. Jacob seems to indicate that, unlike his brother Zebulun, Issachar became corrupt through her riches.

16. DAN SHALL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE, AS ONE OF THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL.

17. DAN SHALL BE A SERPENT BY THE WAY, AN ADDER IN THE PATH, THAT  
BITETH THE HORSE HEELS, SO THAT HIS RIDER SHALL FALL BACKWARD.

18. I HAVE WAITED FOR THY SALVATION, O LORD!

The story of the tribe of Dan is long and complicated. He was the first son of Bilhah. In times past the first son of the concubine had been considered a first son in his own right, for example Ishmael and Zimran, Abraham's first-born by Keturah. To a certain extent the author recognizes that claim by making Dan the leader of the tribes which marched on the northern side of the Ark during the forty-year trek through Sinai (see Num. 2:25). Fate played another strange trick on Dan much as she had on Zelophehad. He was the man from the tribe of Manasseh who had no sons, and the consequence of this act of fate, insofar as it played a role in the fall of the Jubilee year, was discussed in the commentary to Gen. 15:9.

Something similar happened to Dan as well. Dan had only one son, and accordingly he was given a rather small inheritance. However, when the census was taken at the end of the Book of Numbers, there were 64,400 people. Dan had become larger than any other tribe with the exception of Judah, and consequently the lands which he had acquired were too small.

Dan's inheritance was officially to have been in the west, but when Abram

chased Chedorlaomer he was said to have *pursued them unto Dan* (Gen. 14:14). As we go through the story of Dan we must remember that he was doomed to live on the northern border, even from the days of Abram.

The first Danite of any prominence was Aholiab, the son of Ahisamach (Ex. 31:6), to whom God gave the wisdom of the arts so that he might help Bezaleel build the Ark.

The first indication that something was wrong in the tribe of Dan was when the half-Egyptian son of Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, cursed the Lord a few verses before the giving of the laws concerning the Jubilee Year (Lev. 24:11).

Perhaps another one of the difficulties which led to the corruption of Dan was that it happened to inherit the land bordering the Philistines. The other tribes had begun to settle their own lands. The great battles with the Philistines were yet to come but at this moment his brothers were unprepared, and Dan was forced to face them by himself. Given this position, it was not surprising that the private hero, Samson, should come from their midst.

Because of the inequities caused by her sudden growth in population as well as her troubles with the Philistines, the Danites decided to capture more lands for themselves along the northern border (Josh. 19:47). Since her original lot was on the western border her lands would have been conquered first if the Children of Israel had not become frightened by the giants, but as it was Joshua was forced to attack from the east. Dan, who had faithfully helped all his brothers conquer their lands, was forced to conquer his own land by himself. It is not surprising then that as they passed through Mount Ephraim they took Micah's private sanctuary and separated themselves from their brothers (Judg. Chap. 18). The wisdom of the arts, which God had given to Aholiab, now allowed Dan to set up his own altar. This was the last blow to the practice of the Jubilee Year.

When Jeroboam became king he put up the altar at Beth-el and rebuilt the one at Dan. These two altars became the symbol of disunity which lasted from the end of the reign of King Solomon to the final moments of King Josiah. At the end of his reign Josiah was able to reunify the country by destroying the altar at Beth-el. But so far as one can tell from the text, the Babylonians came, and the altar at Dan was yet to have been destroyed.

Dan was put in a most difficult position. He *judged* Israel when he decided to break with her and become independent. Although his grounds seem to justify this action, when he set up the private altar he became *an adder in the path*.

The unification of Israel under Josiah did not include the destruction of the altar at Dan, which waited while the land was ruled by Babylon. The author is thinking of its destruction which was yet to come and of true unification when he says *I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord*.

#### 19. GAD, A TROOP SHALL TROUNCE GAD; BUT HE WILL TROUNCE AT LAST.

By virtue of having been Zilpah's first-born, Gad also had certain claims. This would be sufficient to understand his decision to join Reuben in his request of the

land east of the Jordan. By placing himself in such a position Gad became a buffer between Israel and the east. The words which are translated *troop* and *trounce* are puns on the Hebrew word *Gad*. Although the word *troop* occasionally appears in other contexts, it is usually found in reference to the attacks from the east, and one would imagine that Jacob's words referred to the precarious position in which Gad placed himself by pressing for the eastern province (see I Kings 13:24; II Kings 5:2, 6:23, 13:21, and 24:2).

20. OUT OF ASHER HIS BREAD SHALL BE FAT, AND HE SHALL YIELD ROYAL  
DAINTIES.

The prophecies concerning Dan and Gad each turn on a play on words. In the case of Dan the Hebrew word *to judge* is a play on the word *Dan*, and in the case of Gad both the words *troop* and *trounce* are plays on the name *Gad*. The same is true in the present case, but in a more complicated way. The word used for *bread* may also be translated *war* (Judg. 5:8). The word for *fat* can also mean *stout* or *bold* and is sometimes used to describe a soldier (Judg. 3:29). The word translated *dainties* can also be translated *rope* or *bonds* (Job 38:31; I Sam. 15:32). The translation could then read: *Out of Asher there shall come his hearty men of war, but it shall provide bonds for the king.*

In the Second Book of Kings, Elisha seems to imply that King Joash was in a position to secure Israel's future by preventing the conquest of Hazael. The passage reads as follows:

*Now Elisha was fallen sick of his sickness whereof he died. And Joash the King of Israel came down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And Elisha said unto him, Take bow and arrows. And he took unto him bow and arrows. And he said to the King of Israel, Put thine hand upon the bow. And he put his hand upon it: and Elisha put his hands upon the King's hands. And he said, Open the window eastward. And he opened it. Then Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them. And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the King of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice. And Elisha died, and they buried him. And the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And it came to pass, as they were burying a man, that, behold, they spied a band of men; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet. But Hazael King of Syria oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. And the Lord was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet. So Hazael King of Syria died; and Benhadad his son reigned in his stead. And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz took again out of the hand of Benhadad*

*the son of Hazael the cities, which he had taken out of the hand of Jehoahaz his father by war. Three times did Joash beat him, and recovered the cities of Israel. (II Kings 13:14–25)*

If Aphek was a turning point in the struggle between Israel and the east then the words of Jacob make a certain amount of sense, since Aphek belonged to the tribe of Asher (Josh. 19:35).

21. NAPHTALI IS A HIND LET LOOSE: HE GIVETH GOODLY WORDS.

Verse Twenty-one is obscure. However the word translated *hind* can also be translated *the mighty* and is used in that sense to describe those who were captured by Nebuchadnezzar and sent to Babylon. Something of this nature may have been on the author's mind, but the point is unclear.

22. JOSEPH IS A FRUITFUL BOUGH, EVEN A FRUITFUL BOUGH BY A WELL, WHOSE BRANCHES RUN OVER THE WALL:

23. THE ARCHERS HAVE SORELY GREIVED HIM AND SHOT AT HIM AND HATED HIM.

24. BUT HIS BOW ABODE IN STRENGTH, AND THE ARMS OF HIS HANDS WERE MADE STRONG BY THE HANDS OF THE MIGHTY GOD OF JACOB; (FROM THENCE IS THE SHEPHERD, THE STONE OF ISRAEL:)

25. EVEN BY THE GOD OF THY FATHER, WHO SHALL HELP THEE: AND BY THE ALMIGHTY, WHO SHALL BLESS THEE WITH BLESSINGS OF HEAVEN ABOVE, BLESSINGS OF THE DEEP THAT LIETH UNDER, BLESSINGS OF THE BREASTS AND OF THE WOMB:

26. THE BLESSINGS OF THY FATHER HAVE PREVAILED ABOVE THE BLESSINGS OF MY PROGENITORS, UNTO THE UTMOST BOUND OF THE EVERLASTING HILLS: THEY SHALL BE ON THE HEAD OF JOSEPH, AND ON THE CROWN OF THE HEAD OF HIM THAT WAS SEPARATE FROM HIS BRETHREN.

Jacob's words concerning Joseph are the most obscure, and the present commentator makes no pretense of having understood them. First of all, the name Joseph should not have appeared in the chapter at all, since there will be no tribe of Joseph and the future lives of Manasseh and Ephraim have already been dealt with in the previous chapter.

Verse Twenty-two is quite obscure, and the modern translation by the Jewish Publication Society reads: *Joseph is a wild ass by a spring—wild colts on a hillside*. The word which means either *wild ass* or *bough* is not the word used for Ishmael, and its meaning is rather obscure. However, the word translated *hillside* or *wall* is *shur*, the name of one of the cities connected with Ishmael (see commentary to Gen. 20:1).

Verses Twenty-three and Twenty-four present an even greater difficulty. In the light of the commentary to Gen. 48:22 one would have expected these verses to refer to a passage in one of the later books. However, there is no such passage.

Various medieval commentators understand it to refer to any number of incidents in the lives of Joseph's descendants, but the author generally does not allow us to make such wild guesses but points to the passage itself by the use of a similar vocabulary.

For these reasons the present commentator is completely baffled and has nothing further to say.

27. BENJAMIN SHALL RAVEN AS A WOLF: IN THE MORNING HE SHALL DEVOUR THE PREY, AND AT NIGHT HE SHALL DIVIDE THE SPOIL.

When Joseph's brothers put him in the well, Benjamin was not there. We know that he meant a great deal to Joseph, but from the Book of Genesis we know nothing about Benjamin himself. The first real glance we had of the tribe of Benjamin was the frightful story at the end of the Book of Judges which was retold in the commentary to Gen. 22:6. That was the story about the Levite from Ephraim who stopped overnight among the Benjaminites with his concubine from Bethlehem. The story set the stage for the Books of Samuel by showing the necessity for a king. That necessity implied the need of a prophet also. The prophet came from Ephraim, the first king from Benjamin itself, and when that king proved false, the true king came from Bethlehem.

In the Second Book of Samuel, Benjamin continues to be the leader of the most dissident factions. Benjamin was behind the revolt of Ishbosheth and fought the mock battle which caused so much bloodshed (II Sam. 2:9, 2:25 and commentary to Gen. 21:1).

The revolutions which were threatened by Ziba, Sheba, and Shimei were all spearheaded by the Tribe of Benjamin. (See II Sam. 16:5, and 19:18, 21:1.) In the revolution under Absalom, David was forced far north. This would imply that Benjamin had opposed David in that revolution as well.

The real revolution, the one which broke the state in two, began as a consequence of Solomon's policies and his attraction to foreign ways. At that time God promised that He would leave one tribe in the hands of David's descendants. Not long thereafter, He sent the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam in order to persuade him to begin the revolution. Ahijah's rhetoric was strange. He took a new garment, ripped it into twelve pieces, gave ten of them to Jeroboam, and one of them he promised to the house of David (I Kings 11:30,31). Ten plus one equals eleven, and the reader is left to wonder about the twelfth piece.

As a consequence of his harsh policy Solomon's son, King Rehoboam, became easy prey for Jeroboam. Israel sent a request to Rehoboam asking for relief from their burdensome taxes. The king refused, and the text continues:

*So when all Israel saw that the King hearkened not unto them, the people answered the King, saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse; to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel de-*

*parted unto their tents. . . So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. And it came to pass, when all Israel heard that Jeroboam was come again, that they sent and called him unto the congregation, and made him speed to get him king over all Israel: there was none that followed the house of David, but the tribe of Judah only. (I Kings 12:16–20)*

Then, at the last moment, the tribe for whom the twelfth piece was destined was revealed.

*And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the Tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. But the word of God came unto Shemaiah, the man of God, saying, Speak unto Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, King of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and Benjamin, and to the remnant of the people, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the Children of Israel: return every man to his house: for this thing is from Me. They hearkened therefore to the word of the Lord, and returned to depart according to the word of the Lord. (I Kings 12:21–24)*

Benjamin, who had been the leader of every revolution against David, was the only tribe to stand with him in that most crucial hour when the land was divided. The next verse begins the story of Jeroboam's decision to build the altars in Dan and Beth-el which were to remain the symbols of Israel's disunity until the reign of King Josiah.

*Benjamin was a wolf in the morning*, throughout the reign of David and Solomon, but the meaning of the phrase *at night he divided the spoils* is still perplexing.

28. AND THESE ARE THE TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL: AND THIS IS IT THAT THEIR FATHER SPAKE UNTO THEM, AND BLESSED THEM: EVERY ONE ACCORDING TO HIS BLESSING HE BLESSED THEM.
29. AND HE CHARGED THEM, AND SAID UNTO THEM, I AM TO BE GATHERED UNTO MY PEOPLE: BURY ME WITH MY FATHERS IN THE CAVE THAT IS IN THE FIELD OF EPHRON THE HITTITE.
30. IN THE CAVE THAT IS IN THE FIELD OF MACHPELAH, WHICH IS BEFORE MAMRE, IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, WHICH ABRAHAM BOUGHT WITH THE FIELD OF EPHRON THE HITTITE FOR A POSSESSION OF A BURYING PLACE.
31. THERE THEY BURIED ABRAHAM AND SARAH HIS WIFE: THERE THEY BURIED ISAAC AND REBEKAH HIS WIFE: AND THERE I BURIED LEAH.
32. THE PURCHASE OF THE FIELD AND OF THE CAVE THAT IS THEREIN WAS FROM THE CHILDREN OF HETH.
33. AND WHEN JACOB HAD MADE AN END OF COMMANDING HIS SONS, HE EXPIRED, AND WAS GATHERED UNTO HIS PEOPLE.

After these words, Jacob blessed his sons and instructed them to bury him in the cave of his fathers, where he would be waiting for them in the way in which

the dead wait. They bury themselves deep in a land. But like Rebekah's nurse or Rachel's gods they come forth.

## CHAPTER L

1. AND JOSEPH FELL UPON HIS FATHER'S FACE, AND WEPT UPON HIM, AND KISSED HIM.
2. AND JOSEPH COMMANDED HIS SERVANTS THE PHYSICIANS TO EMBALM HIS FATHER: AND THE PHYSICIANS EMBALMED ISRAEL.
3. AND FORTY DAYS WERE FULFILLED FOR HIM; FOR SO ARE FULFILLED THE DAYS OF THOSE WHICH ARE EMBALMED; AND THE EGYPTIANS MOURNED FOR HIM THREESCORE AND TEN DAYS.

The number forty has occurred for the last time in the book of Genesis. These were the number of days required for *embalming* Israel. Although Joseph will also be *embalmed* at the end of the chapter, the word will never be used again in any of the books with which we have been dealing, and in fact it will only appear once again in the whole of the Bible. It was primarily an Egyptian practice based on the notion that the body would live again.

In Verse Thirty-three of the last chapter, Jacob was said to have *expired*. This word occurs eleven times in our books; however, on almost every other occasion it was accompanied by the statement *and he died* (Gen. 7:21,22; 25:8; 25:17; 35:29; Num. 17:28, 20:29, cf. 20:26; but compare Num. 20:3 with Num. 20:4).

The most obvious parallels to the present verse are Gen. 25:8, 25:17, and 35:29, where the addition of the words *and he died* always appear in the text. The fact that they are missing at this point seems to reflect some relationship to the practice of *embalming*. This interpretation even appears more reasonable in the light of the reference to forty days, which, as we have seen in countless other instances, implies a period of waiting.

When Joseph commanded the Egyptian physicians to *embalm* Israel, i.e., to wrap him up in a sheet like a cocoon, the author was not thinking of Jacob, but of the whole of Israel, which was to be wrapped up and asleep for four hundred years until they were waked by Moses.

The Egyptians mourned for seventy days. The numbers seventy and seven have played as great a role in the text as the numbers forty and four hundred. The present commentator has tried diligently to find some thread connecting those passages as he did in the case of those with forty, but no order appeared. Perhaps such an order will one day appear to another commentator of greater insight.

4. AND WHEN THE DAYS OF HIS MOURNING WERE PAST, JOSEPH SPAKE UNTO THE HOUSE OF PHARAOH, SAYING, IF NOW I HAVE FOUND GRACE IN YOUR EYES, SPEAK, I PRAY YOU, IN THE EARS OF PHARAOH, SAYING.
5. MY FATHER MADE ME SWEAR, SAYING, LO, I DIE: IN MY GRAVE WHICH I

HAVE DIGGED FOR ME IN THE LAND OF CANAAN, THERE SHALT THOU BURY ME. NOW THEREFORE LET ME GO UP, I PRAY THEE, AND BURY MY FATHER, AND I WILL COME AGAIN.

6. AND PHARAOH SAID, GO UP AND BURY THY FATHER, ACCORDING AS HE MADE THEE SWEAR.

Joseph's request was not spoken directly to Pharaoh. The traditional commentators explain this fact by claiming that it would have been wrong for any man in mourning to appear before him. This explanation may be true, but Pharaoh's words in Verse Six, spoken directly to Joseph, would seem to argue against such an interpretation. Thirteen years have passed since the famine, and it may be that Joseph's power has already begun to wane. Joseph's need for an intercessor may be the first sign of the break between Pharaoh and Israel which will appear at the beginning of the Book of Exodus.

7. AND JOSEPH WENT UP TO BURY HIS FATHER: AND WITH HIM WENT UP ALL THE SERVANTS OF PHARAOH, THE ELDERS OF HIS HOUSE, AND ALL THE ELDERS OF THE LAND OF EGYPT,

If Pharaoh had begun to forget Joseph, clearly the old men of Egypt who remembered what Joseph had done for them still held him in respect. In the commentary to Gen. 22:15 we already noted the Biblical insistence upon the decency of the Egyptian people as opposed to Pharaoh himself.

8. AND ALL THE HOUSE OF JOSEPH, AND HIS BRETHREN, AND HIS FATHER'S HOUSE: ONLY THEIR LITTLE ONES, AND THEIR FLOCKS, AND THEIR HERDS, THEY LEFT IN THE LAND OF GOSHEN.

Verse Eight is a reference to Ex. 10:8–10,24 and 12:37. At that time Pharaoh again demanded that the *little ones* and *flocks* be *left in the land of Goshen* to guarantee their return, but Moses refused.

9. AND THERE WENT UP WITH HIM BOTH CHARIOTS AND HORSEMEN; AND IT WAS A VERY GREAT COMPANY.

10. AND THEY CAME TO THE THRESHING FLOOR OF ATAD, WHICH IS BEYOND THE JORDAN, AND THERE THEY MOURNED WITH A GREAT AND VERY SORE LAMENTATION: AND HE MADE A MOURNING FOR HIS FATHER SEVEN DAYS.

The place of mourning is described as *beyond the Jordan*, but the *threshing floor of Atad* is not mentioned in any other passage and so cannot be located geographically. In the Bible the phrase *beyond the Jordan* never became crystallized. From the point of view of the West Bank it often refers to the East Bank, but from the point of view of the East Bank it can equally refer to the West Bank. In other words, we are left with two possible interpretations. Either the mourning itself actually took place east of the Jordan, or the statement itself is made from

the point of view of the Eastern Bank. While the decision would be difficult to make, it is clear that some reference to the East Bank is being made. This reference is of some significance since it implies that the original plan, according to which the sons of Israel were to have attacked from the south and to have inherited only so far as the Jordan River, would necessarily fail. The ramifications of this failure have already been discussed in the remarks concerning the fall of the Jubilee Year (see commentary to Gen. 15:9)

Although the *threshing floor of Atad* is never mentioned again, the Hebrew word *Atad* will appear twice. It means *bramble* and appears in Jotham's famous parable of the trees. This parable presents the most theoretical argument opposing kingship. In it the *bramble* represented the one useless man and hence the only man who would have time to be king (see commentary to Gen. 35:4).

On the other hand, the reference to a *threshing floor* may well be a reference to Jerusalem (see II Sam. 24:16–25 and commentary to Gen. 25:21). If this reference is intended it would imply a further cause for mourning, since Jotham's parable is spoken from the highest point of view with regard to politics whereas the *threshing floor* was the scene of David's acquiescence to the need for compromise, given the ways of man.

11. AND WHEN THE INHABITANTS OF THE LAND, THE CANAANITES, SAW THE MOURNING IN THE FLOOR OF ATAD, THEY SAID, THIS IS A GRIEVOUS MOURNING TO THE EGYPTIANS: WHEREFORE THE NAME OF IT WAS CALLED ABEL-MIZRAIM, WHICH IS BEYOND JORDAN.

The Canaanites, who witnessed this ceremony, renamed the *floor of Atad* the *grievous mourning of the Egyptians*, but these words may have a double significance. They certainly refer to the old Egyptian men who mourned over the death of Jacob, but they may also refer to another mourning which was to take place four hundred years later.

It is not impossible that the Canaanites saw in this act Israel's fervent determination to return one day. At least it is said that when Napoleon happened upon a Jewish community on the Ninth Day of Av, on which it is traditional to mourn for the destruction of the Temple, he too predicted that they would one day return to their homeland.

12. AND HIS SONS DID UNTO HIM ACCORDING AS HE COMMANDED THEM:

13. FOR HIS SONS CARRIED HIM INTO THE LAND OF CANAAN, AND BURIED HIM IN THE CAVE OF THE FIELD OF MACHPELAH, WHICH ABRAHAM BOUGHT WITH THE FIELD FOR A POSSESSION OF A BURYING PLACE OF EPHRON THE HITTITE, BEFORE MAMRE.

14. AND JOSEPH RETURNED INTO EGYPT, HE, AND HIS BRETHREN, AND ALL THAT WENT UP WITH THEM TO BURY HIS FATHER, AFTER HE HAD BURIED HIS FATHER.

The word *carried* which appears in Verse Thirteen is the same as the word for *lifts*, so central to the movement of the book. But the imagery shifts a bit. The brothers become the asses committed to taking on their shoulders the true burden of their father by carrying on the responsibilities of the New Way.

15. AND WHEN JOSEPH'S BRETHREN SAW THAT THEIR FATHER WAS DEAD, THEY SAID, JOSEPH WILL PERADVENTURE HATE US, AND WILL CERTAINLY REQUITE US ALL THE EVIL WHICH WE DID UNTO HIM.
16. AND THEY SENT A MESSENGER UNTO JOSEPH, SAYING, THY FATHER DID COMMAND BEFORE HE DIED, SAYING,
17. SO SHALL YE SAY UNTO JOSEPH, FORGIVE, I PRAY THEE NOW, THE TRESPASS OF THY BRETHREN, AND THEIR SIN: FOR THEY DID UNTO THEE EVIL: AND NOW, WE PRAY THEE, FORGIVE THE TRESPASS OF THE SERVANTS OF THE GOD OF THY FATHER. AND JOSEPH WEPT WHEN THEY SPAKE UNTO HIM.
18. AND HIS BRETHREN ALSO WENT AND FELL DOWN BEFORE HIS FACE: AND THEY SAID, BEHOLD, WE BE THY SERVANTS.
19. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO THEM, FEAR NOT: FOR AM I IN THE PLACE OF GOD?
20. BUT AS FOR YOU, YE THOUGHT EVIL AGAINST ME; BUT GOD MEANT IT UNTO GOOD, TO BRING TO PASS, AS IT IS THIS DAY, TO SAVE MUCH PEOPLE ALIVE.

The word which has been translated *forgive* in Verse Seventeen is again the word which had been translated *lift*, and which was referred to in the last commentary. Its final appearance in the text represents a comment on the book as a whole. The New Way has been represented as a way of compromise—a compromise between God's original aspirations for his creation and the way which men would have taken left to their own devices.

The *forgiveness* spoken of in Verse Seventeen is further defined in Verse Twenty in terms of God's converting the bad plan to good. This understanding of divine providence is perhaps the clearest way of stating the New Way, within which the lowest desires of men are set within proper bounds and endowed with nobility of purpose. The New Way must be distinguished from Hobbes' understanding of man by that nobility, which Hobbes believed deleterious to the solidity of the lowest, and it must be distinguished from pagan practices, which presuppose that the chaotic waters within the human soul can be used for the benefit of mankind of their natural state. Therefore pagans do not practice circumcision, nor do they understand the rise of art to be painful.

21. NOW THEREFORE FEAR YE NOT: I WILL NOURISH YOU, AND YOUR LITTLE ONES. AND HE COMFORTED THEM, AND SPAKE KINDLY UNTO THEM.
22. AND JOSEPH DWELT IN EGYPT, HE, AND HIS FATHER'S HOUSE: AND JOSEPH LIVED AN HUNDRED AND TEN YEARS.

While Joseph's words in Verse Twenty-one seem to represent God's position, Joseph himself fell short of those expectations. He did not live a full life of one

hundred and twenty years but died at the age of one hundred and ten, as will his most famous offspring, Joshua (Josh. 2:8). As was indicated in the last chapter, these labors will ultimately fall on the shoulders of Judah.

23. AND JOSEPH SAW EPHRAIM'S CHILDREN OF THE THIRD GENERATION: THE CHILDREN ALSO OF MACHIR THE SON OF MANASSEH WERE BROUGHT UP UPON JOSEPH'S KNEES.

Joseph's joy at the birth of Machir is intended to be ironic. Machir was the father of Zelophehad, the man who had three daughters but no sons. The sons of Machir as a whole were the innocent cause of the decision to extend Israel's borders beyond the Jordan (see commentary to Gen. 9:15).

24. AND JOSEPH SAID UNTO HIS BRETHREN, I DIE: AND GOD WILL SURELY VISIT YOU, AND BRING YOU OUT OF THIS LAND UNTO THE LAND WHICH HE SWARE TO ABRAHAM, TO ISAAC, AND TO JACOB.

25. AND JOSEPH TOOK AN OATH OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL, SAYING, GOD WILL SURELY VISIT YOU, AND YE SHALL CARRY UP MY BONES FROM HENCE.

26. SO JOSEPH DIED, BEING AN HUNDRED AND TEN YEARS OLD; AND THEY EMBALMED HIM, AND HE WAS PUT IN A COFFIN IN EGYPT.

The last two verses of the Book of Joshua read:

*And the bones of Joseph, which the Children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem, for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph. And Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill that pertained to Phinehas his son, which was given him in Mount Ephraim.*  
(Josh. 24:32,33)

In these verses Joseph's last request was fulfilled, but his burial spot was the city of Shechem, the place in which Levi had killed Hamor and in which Joseph himself came so near to being killed by his brothers.

## EPILOGUE

Under the *oak* at Allon-bachuth Rebekah's nurse lies; come, let us wake her. There is still an altar up in Dan to be torn down. Who built it? Have you not heard that one day the sons of Hegel came to vanquish the Philistine and plant their banner in the sea? We, their children, even to the third and fourth generation, lulled to sleep by the baubles of progress, believed all. But now their banner is sunk; once again the sea rages around us, and the modern myth is dead. Science, they said, can make the earth *grass grass*, but there came forth weeds and mushrooms.

Today no man prays at the altar of progress, but its ghost still reigns over the land. We believed all, and only nothingness remains.

A farmer hung himself on the expectation of plenty and a world on the hope of eternal peace.

A disappointed generation runs through the lands of the wild ass, spoiling it as they go. They did right to leave the cities of the plain, now called megalopolis, but they wandered east in search of Eden, no place for him who has known the city. The serpent's curse can still be our blessing. If science cannot kill the serpent, can we not bruise its head?

The modern spies tell us that God is dead. But caring not for the dumb beast laden with spicery and balm and myrrh who guarded over His body, they could not see the lion.