

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
THE UNITED SYNAGOGUE OF CONSERVATIVE JUDAISM



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⁴Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother Esau in the land of Seir, the country of Edom, ⁵and instructed them as follows, “Thus shall you say, ‘To my lord Esau, thus says your servant Jacob: I stayed with Laban and remained until now; ⁶I have acquired cattle, asses, sheep, and male and female slaves; and I send this message to my lord in the hope of gaining your favor.’” ⁷The messengers returned to Jacob, saying, “We came to your brother Esau; he himself is coming to meet you, and there are four hun-

4 וַיִּשְׁלַח יַעֲקֹב מַלְאָכִים לְפָנָיו אֶל-עֵשָׂו אָחִיו אֶרְצָה שְׂעִיר שְׂדֵה אֲדוֹם: 5 וַיֹּצֵא אֹתָם לֵאמֹר כֹּה תֹאמְרוּן לְאֲדֹנָי לְעֵשָׂו כֹּה אָמַר עַבְדְּךָ יַעֲקֹב עִם-לְבָן גִּרְתִּי וְאַחַר עַד-עַתָּה: 6 וַיְהִי-לִי שׂוֹר וַחֲמֹר צֹאן וְעֶבֶד וְשִׁפְחָה וְאֲשָׁלְחָה לְהַגִּיד לְאֲדֹנָי לְמִצְאֵחֹן בְּעֵינֶיךָ: 7 וַיֵּשְׁבוּ הַמַּלְאָכִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר בָּאוּ אֵל-אָחִיךָ אֶל-עֵשָׂו וְגַם הֵלֵךְ לִקְרַאתְךָ

JACOB AND ESAU: THE CONFRONTATION (32:4–33:20)

Jacob resumes his homeward journey. Long-suppressed memories begin to haunt his consciousness. The specter of a vengeful Esau looms before him.

JACOB'S PREPARATIONS (vv. 4–22)

GATHERING INFORMATION (vv. 4–7)

4. Seir The narrative assumes that Esau/Edom by this time had migrated east of the Jordan, having dispossessed from Seir the aboriginal Horites or being engaged in dispossessing them.

5. To my lord Esau This opening phrase identifying the recipient is part of the message. It conforms to the standard letter-writing style of the ancient Near East.

lord . . . servant This normally deferential mode of address, used by a vassal speaking to his lord, is motivated here by fear and intended to be conciliatory.

I stayed with Laban The Hebrew verb for “stayed with” (גור) here connotes both tempo-

rary residence and loss of protection. As to his reasons for going to Laban in the first place, Jacob says nothing.

and remained until now This explains why he had not contacted Esau previously.

6. I have acquired Jacob hints that he can pay off his brother, if the need arises. Listing each item, he omits mention of the camels, the most valuable of all his livestock, even though they are listed in verse 8 and are part of the gift in verse 16. Probably, he understates his possessions so that the gift will be that much more of a surprise and delight to Esau.

7. The messengers returned They report back that Esau seems to have obtained independent intelligence about Jacob's movements.

coming to meet The phrase can convey either amity or enmity. Jacob is thus unable to decipher Esau's intentions.

four hundred men The standard size of a militia and, therefore, ominous (see 1 Sam. 22:2, 25:13, 30:10,17).

As this *parashah* opens, Jacob's return to the Land from Laban's house brings him to the same boundary where he dreamed and prayed 20 years earlier. Here he will undergo the single most important event in his life, the nighttime struggle with a mysterious stranger that concludes with his being given a new name, Israel, and a new sense of who he is as reflected by that name. He will be reunited with his brother Esau, as Isaac and Ishmael were reunited late in life (25:9) and as Joseph and his brothers will be reunited in the next generation.

5. I stayed with Laban The letters of the Hebrew word גרתי (“I stayed,” *garti*) are the same as those in תריג (“*taryag*”) with the numerical value of 613, recalling the 613 commandments of the Torah. This prompted Rashi to interpret Jacob's words to mean “I stayed with Laban but maintained my integrity; I was not corrupted by him.”

7. your brother Esau Esau is viewed as the ancestor of the Edomites (36:1) who sided with the Babylonians in destroying the First Temple and as the prototype of later Roman and Euro-

dred men with him.”⁸ Jacob was greatly frightened; in his anxiety, he divided the people with him, and the flocks and herds and camels, into two camps, ⁹thinking, “If Esau comes to the one camp and attacks it, the other camp may yet escape.”

¹⁰Then Jacob said, “O God of my father Abraham and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, ‘Return to your native land and I will deal bountifully with you!’ ¹¹I am unworthy of all the kindness that You have so steadfastly shown Your servant: with my staff alone I crossed this Jordan, and now I have become two camps. ¹²Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; else, I fear, he may come and strike me down, mothers and children alike. ¹³Yet You have said, ‘I will deal bountifully with you and make your offspring as the sands of the sea, which are too numerous to count.’”

DEFENSIVE MEASURES (vv. 8–9)

8. Jacob was greatly frightened He is aware that retreat would violate his pact with Laban, and he cannot flee because he is encumbered with small children and much livestock.

two camps Jacob decides to minimize his losses in the event of an attack.

PRAYER (vv. 10–13)

10. Then Jacob said The opening words combine quotations from revelations at Bethel and Haran, which mark the beginning and end of Jacob’s 20-year exile (see 28:13–15, 31:3).

וְאַרְבַּע־מֵאוֹת אִישׁ עִמּוֹ: ⁸וַיִּירָא יַעֲקֹב
מְאֹד וַיִּצָר לוֹ וַיַּחַץ אֶת־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ
וְאֶת־הַצֹּאן וְאֶת־הַבָּקָר וְהַגְּמָלִים לְשְׁנֵי
מַחֲנֹת: ⁹וַיֹּאמֶר אִם־יָבֹא עָשׂו אֶל־
הַמַּחֲנֶה הָאֶחָד וְהִכּוּהוּ וְהָיָה הַמַּחֲנֶה
הַנֶּשְׂאָר לְפָלִיטָה:

¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי אַבְרָהָם וְאֱלֹהֵי
אָבִי יִצְחָק יְהוָה הָאֹמֵר אֵלַי שׁוּב לְאַרְצְךָ
וּלְמִלְדֹתֶךָ וְאֵיטִיבָה עִמָּךְ: ¹¹קִטְנִיתִי
מִכָּל הַחֲסָדִים וּמִכָּל־הָאֲמֻת אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ
אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ כִּי בְמִקְלֵי עֲבָרְתִי אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן
הִזָּה וְעַתָּה הֵייתִי לְשְׁנֵי מַחֲנֹת:
¹²הַצִּילֵנִי נָא מִיַּד אַחִי מִיַּד עָשׂו כִּי־יָרָא
אֹנְכִי אֹתוֹ פֶּן־יָבֹא וְהִכָּנִי אִם עַל־בָּנָיִם:
¹³וְאַתָּה אָמַרְתָּ הֵיטֵב אֵיטִיב עִמָּךְ
וְשָׂמֵתִי אֶת־זַרְעֲךָ כְּחוֹל הַיָּם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־
שָׂנִי יִסְפָּר מֵרֹב:

I will deal bountifully with you This phrase, which does not appear in God’s promises, is likely an interpretation of “I will be with you” (31:3).

11. this Jordan Standing on the banks of the Jabbok River, Jacob can point to the Jordan, clearly visible in the distance.

12. Deliver me The plea lays bare the terror that seizes Jacob at this moment.

13. Yet You have said The prayer concludes with a recollection of God’s promises. At the moment of crisis, it is his concern with descendants that is uppermost in Jacob’s mind.

pean anti-Semites. One *midrash*, perhaps influenced by later Israelite encounters with Esau’s biologic and ideologic descendants, reads, “we went looking for a brother, but instead found Esau, armed and hostile in a very non-brotherly manner” (Gen. R. 75:7). Another has the opposite view: “We met him, and though he is Esau, he is still your brother” (Gen. R. 75:4).

8. frightened . . . anxiety Hebrew: *va-yiyra . . . va-yeitzer*, lit., “he was frightened and upset.” Jacob both feared that he and his family

might be harmed and was upset that he might harm his brother in self-defense (Gen. R. 76:2).

10–13. Years before, as a young man leaving the land of Canaan, Jacob had prayed (Gen. 28:20–22). Some commentators see that youthful prayer as essentially a bargaining with God. “If God protects me and brings me home safely, then I will set up a shrine to God and set aside a tithe of all that God gives me.” Now he prays a more mature prayer. In place of bargaining, there is the realization that he has nothing to offer God and that God has already blessed him

¹⁴After spending the night there, he selected from what was at hand these presents for his brother Esau: ¹⁵200 she-goats and 20 he-goats; 200 ewes and 20 rams; ¹⁶30 milch camels with their colts; 40 cows and 10 bulls; 20 she-asses and 10 he-asses. ¹⁷These he put in the charge of his servants, drove by drove, and he told his servants, “Go on ahead, and keep a distance between droves.” ¹⁸He instructed the one in front as follows, “When my brother Esau meets you and asks you, ‘Whose man are you? Where are you going? And whose [animals] are these ahead of you?’ ¹⁹you shall answer, ‘Your servant Jacob’s; they are a gift sent to my lord Esau; and [Jacob] himself is right behind us.’” ²⁰He gave similar instructions to the second one, and the third, and all the others who followed the droves, namely, “Thus and so shall you say to Esau when you reach him. ²¹And you shall add, ‘And your servant Jacob himself is right behind us.’” For he reasoned, “If I propitiate him with presents in advance, and then face him, perhaps he will show me favor.” ²²And so the gift went on ahead, while he remained in camp that night.

²³That same night he arose, and taking his two wives, his two maidservants, and his eleven

THE GIFT (vv. 14–22)

14. spending the night there At Mahanaim.

presents The Hebrew word *minhah* may mean a gift expressing friendship and respect—or a tribute in recognition of the donor’s subordinate status. The ambiguity in its use here is intentional. Esau is free to interpret it as he wishes.

15–16. There are 550 beasts, a lavish gift.

שני ¹⁴ וילך שם בלילה ההוא ויקח מן־הבא בידו מנחה לעשו אחיו: ¹⁵ עזים מאתיים ותשישים עשרים רחלים מאתיים ואילים עשרים: ¹⁶ גמלים מיניקות ובניהם שלשים פרות ארבעים ופרים עשרה אתנת עשרים ועזים עשרה: ¹⁷ ויתן ביד־עבדיו עדר עדר לבדו ויאמר אל־עבדיו עברו לפני ורוח תשימו בין עדר ובין עדר: ¹⁸ ויצו את־הראשון לאמר כי יפגשך עשו אחי ושאלך לאמר למי־אתה ואנה תלך ולמי אלה לפניך: ¹⁹ ואמרת לעבדך ליעקב מנחה הוא שלוחה לאדני לעשו והנה גם־הוא אחרינו: ²⁰ ויצו גם את־השני גם את־ השלישי גם את־כל־ההלכים אחרי העדרים לאמר בדבר הזה תדברון אל־עשו במצאכם אתו: ²¹ ואמרתם גם הנה עבדך יעקב אחרינו כי־אמר אכפרה פניו במנחה ההלכת לפני ואחרי־כן אראה פניו אולי ישא פני: ²² ותעבר המנחה על־פניו והוא לך בלילה־ההוא במחנה: ²³ ויקם | בלילה ההוא ויקח את־שתי

17. drove by drove Each time, Esau is barely able to scrutinize the animals and interrogate the men, when the next drove arrives.

THE MYSTERIOUS ASSAILANT (vv. 23–33)

The narrative of Jacob’s encounter with Esau is suddenly interrupted. The restless Jacob gets up during the night and decides to transfer his entire camp to the other side of the Jabbok.

23. his eleven children Jacob is about to become Israel, the personification of the tribal

with more than he had any right to claim—love, family, and material wealth. Jacob asks now only for God’s help and protection, on two grounds: (a) God once promised him that he would be the father of a multitude, and that will

not happen if Esau kills him. He has to survive to carry out God’s plan for him. (b) Because what he has to do is too hard for him to do unaided, he needs God’s help.

children, he crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²⁴After taking them across the stream, he sent across all his possessions. ²⁵Jacob was left alone. And a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn. ²⁶When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he wrenched Jacob's hip at its socket, so that the socket of his hip was strained as he wrestled with him. ²⁷Then he said, "Let me go, for dawn is breaking." But

נָשָׂיו וְאֶת־שְׁתֵּי שַׁפְחֹתָיו וְאֶת־אֶחָד עָשָׂר יְלָדָיו וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת מַעְבַּר יַבֵּק׃ ²⁴ וַיִּקְחֵם וַיַּעֲבֵרֵם אֶת־הַנָּחַל וַיַּעֲבֹר אֶת־אֶשְׁרֵלֹו׃ ²⁵ וַיּוֹתֵר יַעֲקֹב לְבָדּוֹ וַיֵּאבֶק אִישׁ עִמּוֹ עַד עֲלֹת הַשָּׁחַר׃ ²⁶ וַיֵּרָא כִּי לֹא יָכֹל לוֹ וַיִּגַע בְּכַף־יָרְכוֹ וַתִּקַּע כַּף־יָרְכוֹ יַעֲקֹב בְּהֶאֱבָקוֹ עִמּוֹ׃ ²⁷ וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁלַחֲנִי כִּי עָלָה הַשָּׁחַר

confederation. Only those directly involved in the evolution of the nation are mentioned. Dinah and the rest of his household are omitted.

the ford of the Jabbok This river, called by the Arabs "Blue River" (Nahr ez-Zerqa), is one of the most important rivers east of the Jordan. Flowing through a deep ravine on a meandering course, it joins the Jordan River at right angles about 20 miles (32 km) north of the Dead Sea. To cross at night with a vast entourage is dangerous. Flat stones or timber would be laid across the shallowest and narrowest part to afford passage.

25. Jacob was left alone He crossed the river repeatedly until all his people and possessions

had been safely transported. Now he is alone in the dead of night.

a man In verses 29 and 31 the person is described as "a divine being" (*elohim*). In the prophet Hosea's account, he is identified as an angel (Hos. 12:4). These terms are often interchangeable in passages dealing with angels.

the break of dawn As dawn approaches, the assailant, trying desperately to disengage himself, delivers a sudden, powerful blow.

26. Jacob's hip at its socket This is the cup-shaped socket in the hip bone that receives the head of the thigh bone.

was strained Or "dislocated."

27. dawn is breaking At this point, Jacob

23. the ford of the Jabbok The Torah may be punning on the term *ma-avar Yabbok*, the crossing or transit point of the Jabbok—and the transition of Jacob to becoming a different person. Also note the wordplay between Jabbok (*Yabbok*) and the word for "he wrestled" (*ye-avek*).

25. a man wrestled with him Who is this mysterious being? The classic commentaries are nearly unanimous in seeing him as evil, a malign force. He may have been Esau's guardian angel (Gen. R. 77:3). "Before encountering Esau in the flesh, his spirit struggled with the spirit of Esau" (N. Leibowitz). He may have been the demonic guardian of the river. His purpose seems to have been to weaken Jacob on the eve of his confrontation with Esau.

Or this may be an account of Jacob's wrestling with his conscience, torn between his human tendency to avoid an unpleasant encounter and the divine impulse in him that urges him to do the difficult but right thing. This position may find support in the text, "you have striven with beings divine and human" (v. 29), which can also be translated, "you have striven with God and with men." We can imagine Ja-

cob saying to himself, "Until now, I have responded to difficult situations by lying and running. I deceived my father. I ran away from Esau. I left Laban's house stealthily instead of confronting him. I hate myself for being a person who lies and runs. But I'm afraid of facing up to the situation." By not defeating his conscience, Jacob wins. He outgrows his Jacob identity as the trickster and becomes Israel, the one who contends with God and people instead of avoiding or manipulating them. At the end of the struggle, he is physically wounded and emotionally depleted. Nevertheless, the Torah describes him (in 33:18) as *shalem*, translated "safe" with connotations of "whole," at peace with himself (*shalem* is related to the word "*shalom*"), possessing an integrity he never had before (*S'fat Emet*).

Rashbam sees God as sending an angel to wrestle with Jacob to prevent him from running away as he may have been tempted to do, compelling him to do the right thing. And B. Jacob writes, "God answers a person's prayers if the person prays by searching himself, becoming his own opponent."

he answered, “I will not let you go, unless you bless me.”²⁸ Said the other, “What is your name?” He replied, “Jacob.”²⁹ Said he, “Your name shall no longer be Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with beings divine and human, and have prevailed.”³⁰ Jacob asked, “Pray tell me your name.” But he said, “You must not ask my name!” And he took leave of him there.³¹ So Jacob named the place Peniel, meaning, “I have seen a divine being face to face, yet my life has been preserved.”³² The sun rose upon him

וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא אֶשְׁלַחְךָ כִּי אִם־בְּרַכְתָּנִי:
 28 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו מִה־שְּׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב:
 29 וַיֹּאמֶר לֹא יַעֲקֹב יִאָמֵר עוֹד שְׁמֶךָ כִּי
 אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־שָׁרִיתָ עִם־אֱלֹהִים וְעִם־
 אַנְשִׁים וַתּוֹכַל: 30 וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר
 הַגִּידָה־נָּא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל
 לְשִׁמִּי וַיְבַרְךָ אֹתוֹ שֵׁם: 31 וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב
 שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם פְּנִיאֵל כִּי־רָאִיתִי אֱלֹהִים
 פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים וַתִּנָּצַל נַפְשִׁי: 32 וַיִּזְרַח־לוֹ
 הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ כַּאֲשֶׁר עָבַר אֶת־פְּנוּאֵל וְהוּא

realizes that his opponent is a supernatural being.

28. What is your name? A rhetorical question that affords opportunity for the names “Jacob” and “Israel” to be mentioned together.

29. Israel Names in the Bible are intertwined with character and destiny. Jacob, purged of the name *ya-akov* and its negative associations, is assured that he will become the patriarch of a nation named Israel. The bestowal of the new name is the core of the blessing and the climax of the episode.

with beings divine and human The humans were Esau and Laban.

and have prevailed The name “Israel” in the Bible was popularly derived from *sarita* (you struggled), referring to Jacob’s struggle and triumph in the face of overwhelming odds in this story. Its actual meaning is “God is superior.”

The earliest two documents outside the Bible to mention Israel give ironic testimony of prevailing against the odds. The first, the victory hymn of King Merneptah of Egypt (ca. 1207 B.C.E.), reports that “Israel is laid waste, his seed is not.” The second earliest document, the victory in-

scription of King Mesha of Moab (ca. 830 B.C.E.), declares “Israel has perished forever.”

30. You must not ask my name! In the period before the Babylonian exile (586 B.C.E.) all angels are anonymous (see Judg. 13:17–18).

31. Peniel Literally, “Face of God.”

meaning Hebrew: *ki*. See Comment to 4:25.

a divine being Hebrew: *elohim*. In Judg. 13, the one repeatedly called “an angel” is also referred to in Hebrew as *elohim* (v. 22).

I have seen . . . face to face The idiom “face to face,” used only of divine–human encounters, may describe either an adversarial experience or one of extraordinary intimacy. Here the deliberate ambiguity reflects the menace and the promise inherent in the furious struggle. This is the biblical way of expressing the intensity of an encounter with the divine presence—the overwhelming nature of the mysterious contact with God.

32. The sun rose Jacob’s flight from home was marked by the setting of the sun (see Gen. 28:11). Fittingly, the sunrise greets him as he crosses back into his native land.

27–28. unless you bless me The blessing must be one I will have earned in my own right, not by guile (Rashi). The angel asks Jacob, “What is your name?” The last time he sought a blessing—when his father asked him “Who are you?”—he answered that question falsely. “Now that you are prepared to testify truthfully

as to who you are, you have shed that previous identity and are prepared to take on a new one, Israel.”

The name *Yisra-el* may be interpreted to mean “one who struggles with God.” Through the ages, Jews have struggled to understand what God means in their lives and have con-

HALAKHAH L’MA’ASEH

32:33 to this day This biblical verse underlies the requirement in kosher slaughter that the sciatic nerve be extracted. Where the cost of removing the nerve is considered prohibitive, the entire hind quarter of the animal is considered unfit for consumption by Jews.

as he passed Penuel, limping on his hip.³³ That is why the children of Israel to this day do not eat the thigh muscle that is on the socket of the hip, since Jacob's hip socket was wrenched at the thigh muscle.

33 Looking up, Jacob saw Esau coming, accompanied by four hundred men. He divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and the two maids,² putting the maids and their children first, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.³ He himself went on ahead and bowed low to the ground seven times until he was near his brother.⁴ Esau ran to greet him. He embraced him and, falling on his neck, he kissed him; and they wept.⁵ Look-

צִלַּע עַל-יָרְכוּ: ³³עַל-פֶּן לְאִי-אֲכָלוּ בְנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת-גִּיד הַנֶּשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר עַל-פֶּךָ הַיָּרֵךְ עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה כִּי נִגַּע בְּכַף-יָרֵךְ יַעֲקֹב בְּגִיד הַנֶּשֶׁה:

לג וַיֵּשָׂא יַעֲקֹב עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא וְהִנֵּה עֹשׂוֹ בָּא וְעִמּוֹ אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת אִישׁ וַיַּחֲץ אֶת-הַיְלָדִים עַל-לֵאָה וְעַל-רָחֵל וְעַל שְׁתֵּי הַשֹּׁפְחוֹת: ²וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת-הַשֹּׁפְחוֹת וְאֶת-יְלָדֵיהֶן רִאשְׁנָה וְאֶת-לֵאָה וְיְלָדֶיהָ אַחֲרָיִם וְאֶת-רָחֵל וְאֶת-יוֹסֵף אַחֲרָיִם: ³וְהוּא עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ אַרְצָה שָׁבַע פְּעָמִים עַד-גֻּשְׁתּוֹ עַד-אָחִיו: ⁴וַיִּרָץ עֹשׂוֹ לִקְרָאתוֹ וַיַּחְבְּקֵהוּ וַיִּפֹּל עַל-צוּאָרוֹ

33. the children of Israel The reference is to the entire people, not only to Jacob's sons. This is the first time that the phrase occurs in the Bible.

to this day These words are written from the perspective of a later age.

the thigh muscle Jewish tradition identifies this term (*gid ha-nashev*) with the sciatic nerve.

RECONCILIATION (vv. 1–11)

1. four hundred men A reminder of Esau's possible hostile intentions. The earlier report is now reality.

He divided The division of people and effects, mentioned in 32:8, had been a tactical precaution in case of flight. Now Jacob is arran-

ging mothers with their children for formal presentation to Esau.

3. bowed low . . . seven times This symbolic act in the ancient Near East denotes submission to a superior authority. Ironically, this is the reversal of Isaac's blessing to Jacob that his mother's sons would bow to him (27:29).

4. he kissed him Esau's undoubtedly sincere kiss—he seems genuinely moved by Jacob's extravagant gesture—signals the conclusion of the chain of events precipitated by that other kiss, Jacob's deceitful kiss, recounted in 27:27, which played a crucial role in the original blessing.

and they wept Jacob's tears are a release from emotional tension, although his anxieties are not entirely eased.

tended with God, insisting that God live up to the divinely proclaimed standards of justice and kindness.

CHAPTER 33

1–2. In this arrangement, Jacob betrays his feelings of whom he is prepared to sacrifice if necessary and whom he is determined to protect. This favoritism toward Rachel and Rachel's son Joseph will lead to serious problems in subsequent chapters. But can any parent hide his or her predilection for treating some children differently from others? Children long to

have their parents recognize their individual strengths and talents, to be treated uniquely, not equally.

4. he kissed him The commentators are divided as to whether Esau's hugs and kisses and kind words were genuine. (The Masoretic text has dots over the words "he kissed him," indicating that there is something unusual about them.) Some are reluctant to credit Esau with any decent motives (Gen. R. 78:9). One *midrash* says, "everything Esau ever did was motivated by hatred, except for this one occasion which was motivated by love" (ARN 34).

ing about, he saw the women and the children. “Who,” he asked, “are these with you?” He answered, “The children with whom God has favored your servant.” ⁶Then the maids, with their children, came forward and bowed low; ⁷next Leah, with her children, came forward and bowed low; and last, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed low. ⁸And he asked, “What do you mean by all this company which I have met?” He answered, “To gain my lord’s favor.” ⁹Esau said, “I have enough, my brother; let what you have remain yours.” ¹⁰But Jacob said, “No, I pray you; if you would do me this favor, accept from me this gift; for to see your face is like seeing the face of God, and you have received me favorably. ¹¹Please accept my present which has been brought to you, for God has favored me and I have plenty.” And when he urged him, he accepted.

5. your servant Jacob continues to address his brother as an inferior in the presence of a superior.

6–7. Then the maids The maids and the wives are presented in ascending order of social status and affection.

8. all this company The servants and droves who had gone on ahead.

9. I have enough Ancient Near Eastern etiquette requires Esau to make a show of refusing the gift, and Jacob to press it on him. The recipient must appear to accept it with reluctance.

עַל־צֹאֲרֵיו וַיִּשְׁקָהוּ* וַיִּבְכוּ: ⁵ וַיִּשָּׂא אֶת־
 עֵינָיו וַיִּרְא אֶת־הַנְּשִׁים וְאֶת־הַיְלָדִים
 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵלֶּה לָּךְ וַיֹּאמֶר הַיְלָדִים
 רַבִּיעִי אֲשֶׁר־חָנַן אֱלֹהִים אֶת־עַבְדְּךָ: ⁶ וַתִּגְשׁוּ
 הַשְּׂפָחוֹת הַנֶּה וַיִּלְדִּיהֶן וַתִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
⁷ וַתִּגַּשׁ גַּם־לֵאָה וַיִּלְדֶּיהָ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ וְאַחַר
 נִגַּשׁ יוֹסֵף וְרָחֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ: ⁸ וַיֹּאמֶר מִי לָּךְ
 כָּל־הַמַּחֲנֶה הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר פָּגַשְׁתִּי וַיֹּאמֶר
 לְמַצְאֶחֶן בְּעֵינַי אֲדֹנָי: ⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר עֲשׂוּ יֵשׁ־
 לִי רֵב אָחִי יְהִי לָּךְ אֲשֶׁר־לָּךְ: ¹⁰ וַיֹּאמֶר
 יַעֲקֹב אֶל־נָא אִם־נָא מַצְאֵתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ
 וְלָקַחְתָּ מִנְּחָתִי מִיָּדַי כִּי עַל־כֵּן רָאִיתִי
 פָּנֶיךָ כְּרֹאֵת פְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים וַתִּרְצַנִּי: ¹¹ קַח־
 נָא אֶת־בְּרֹכְתִי אֲשֶׁר הִבַּאת לָּךְ כִּי־חָנְנִי
 אֱלֹהִים וְכִי יֵשׁ־לִי כָּל וַיַּפְצֵר־בוּ וַיִּקַּח:

v. 4. נקוד על ו י ש ק ה ו

my brother In contrast to Jacob’s mode of address.

10. like seeing the face of God Jacob might be saying to Esau: I have been admitted to your presence; you have been graciously indulgent of me; my encounter with you is like that with a divine being, or like a pilgrimage to a shrine, which one does not make empty-handed.

11. accept my present By changing his terminology for “present” from the Hebrew word *minhab* (which he had used five times) to *brakhab*, “blessing, gift,” Jacob signals to Esau that

Hirsch comments, “Even Esau gradually relinquishes the sword and begins to feel the chords of human love.” Zornberg sees the brothers’ embrace as resembling Jacob’s encounter with the angel. Their embrace is a combination of hugging in love and grappling in struggle, as each one wants to merge with the other but also to defeat him.

Both Jacob and Esau realize that the mental images each has been carrying of the other for 20 years are no longer accurate.

9. I have enough, my brother For whatever reason, Esau is presented as being unable to accept a gift from Jacob graciously. There is an

art to accepting gifts and compliments, even as there is an art to extending them.

10. like seeing the face of God I have seen the face of God. As a result, I am not the same person I was years ago, the one who tricked you and stole your blessing. I have learned to see you not as an intimidating rival, but as a person fashioned in God’s image. The Midrash understands Jacob’s words about seeing God’s face as an attempt to make an impression: “I have seen the face of God, who is my patron and protector, so you had better respect me” (Gen. R. 75:10).

11. accept my present The literal meaning of Jacob’s words is, “take my blessing,” as if this

¹²And [Esau] said, “Let us start on our journey, and I will proceed at your pace.” ¹³But he said to him, “My lord knows that the children are frail and that the flocks and herds, which are nursing, are a care to me; if they are driven hard a single day, all the flocks will die. ¹⁴Let my lord go on ahead of his servant, while I travel slowly, at the pace of the cattle before me and at the pace of the children, until I come to my lord in Seir.”

¹⁵Then Esau said, “Let me assign to you some of the men who are with me.” But he said, “Oh no, my lord is too kind to me!” ¹⁶So Esau started back that day on his way to Seir. ¹⁷But Jacob journeyed on to Succoth, and built a house for himself and made stalls for his cattle; that is why the place was called Succoth.

¹⁸Jacob arrived safe in the city of Shechem

¹²וַיֹּאמֶר נִסְעָה וְנִלְכָה וְאֵלֵכָה לְנַגְדְּךָ:
¹³וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו אֲדֹנָי יָדַע בְּיַהֲלָדִים
רַפִּים וְהֵצֵאן וְהִבְקֵר עֲלוֹת עָלַי וּדְפָקוּם
יּוֹם אֶחָד וּמָתוּ כָּל-הֵצֵאן:
¹⁴יַעֲבֵר-נָא אֲדֹנָי
לִפְנֵי עַבְדּוֹ וְאֲנִי אֶתְנַהֲלָה לְאַטִּי
לְרַגֵּל הַמִּלְאכָה אֲשֶׁר-לִפְנֵי וּלְרַגֵּל
הַיְלָדִים עַד אֲשֶׁר-אָבֹא אֶל-אֲדֹנָי
שְׁעִירָה:

¹⁵וַיֹּאמֶר יֵשׁוּ אֲצִיגְהֶנָּא עִמָּךְ מִן-הָעַם
אֲשֶׁר אֵתָי וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה אֲמַצְאֶחֶן
בְּעֵינַי אֲדֹנָי:
¹⁶וַיֵּשֶׁב בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא עֲשׂו
לְדַרְכּוֹ שְׁעִירָה:
¹⁷וַיַּעֲקֹב נָסַע סִבְתָּה
וַיִּבֶן לוֹ בַּיִת וּלְמִקְנֵהוּ עָשָׂה סִבְתַּת עַל-בְּנֵי
קָרָא שְׁם-הַמָּקוֹם סִבּוֹת: ס

¹⁸וַיָּבֹא יַעֲקֹב שָׁלֵם עִיר שְׁכֵם אֲשֶׁר

the present is a kind of reparation for the theft of the paternal blessing 20 years earlier. On that occasion, both Isaac and Esau (27:35,36) had referred to the theft of the blessing with the identical Hebrew term now employed by Jacob.

he accepted Esau does not reciprocate, thereby clearly indicating that this is the settling of an old score, not a polite exchange of civilities.

DISENGAGEMENT (vv. 12–17)

12. Let us start on our journey Esau assumes that Jacob was on his way to pay him a visit, so he suggests that they travel together.

14. while I travel From one watering place to another.

16. So Esau started back He now fades from the scene of recorded history, reappearing briefly for Isaac’s funeral (35:29). Esau’s genealogies are given in chapter 36.

17. Succoth Esau departs southward for Seir and Jacob turns northward, recrossing the Jabbok. He no doubt wants to reach the east–west road that connected Canaan with the north–south artery that led from Damascus.

Succoth is now identified with a large tell situated in the Jordan Valley, Deir Allah.

built a house The construction of a dwelling for himself and stalls (*sukkot*) for his cattle indicates an intended prolonged stay at this place before crossing the Jordan into Canaan.

JACOB’S RETURN TO CANAAN

(vv. 18–20)

After a stay at Succoth, Jacob finally returns to his native land—a momentous event recorded with a minimum of detail.

18. arrived Jacob no doubt forded the Jordan near the biblical city Adam (mentioned in Josh. 3:16), situated about 16 miles (27.75 km) up the river from Jericho, from which a road leads to Shechem.

safe The Hebrew word *shalem* may here mean “safe and sound,” or “in friendship” toward the inhabitants. The ancient versions as well as some medieval commentators take *shalem* to be a place-name referring to the village of Salim, about 4 miles (6.5 km) east of Shechem.

the city of Shechem The next verse and

would undo what happened 20 years earlier (“he has taken away my blessing,” Gen. 27:36).

12–17. Despite the reconciliation, wariness

remains. Perhaps it is too much to hope that 20 years of estrangement can be erased in a few minutes, but this represents a start.

which is in the land of Canaan—having come thus from Paddan-aram—and he encamped before the city. ¹⁹The parcel of land where he pitched his tent he purchased from the children of Hamor, Shechem’s father, for a hundred *kesitahs*. ²⁰He set up an altar there, and called it El-elohe-yisrael.

בְּאֶרֶץ פְּנֵעַן בְּבֵאוֹ מִפְּדַן אֲרָם וַיַּחַן אֶת־
פְּנֵי הָעִיר: ¹⁹וַיִּקֶן אֶת־חֶלְקֵת הַשָּׂדֶה
אֲשֶׁר נָטָה־שָׁם אֶהְלוֹ מִיַּד בְּנֵי־חָמוֹר אָבִי
שָׁכֶם בְּמֵאָה קֶשֶׁטָה: ²⁰וַיַּצֵּב־שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ
וַיִּקְרָא־לוֹ אֵל אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ס

34 Now Dinah, the daughter whom Leah had borne to Jacob, went out to visit the daugh-

לד וַתֵּצֵא דִינָה בַת־לֵאָה אֲשֶׁר
חַמִּישִׁי
יָלְדָה לְיַעֲקֹב לְרֵאוֹת בְּבָנוֹת הָאֶרֶץ:

Gen. 34 make clear that Shechem is here a personal name.

encamped before the city The patriarchs generally would stay at the fringes of cities, entering them only rarely.

19. he purchased Jacob, now Israel, purchases a plot of ground, his first acquisition in the future land of Israel. His purpose is not stated. Perhaps, like Abraham (23:1–20), he wishes to establish a family burial ground.

the children of Hamor Because the sale involves permanent separation from their ancestral holdings, the entire clan needs to be involved in the transaction (see chapter 23).

a hundred kesitahs The exact price is stated, as in the purchase of Machpelah in chapter

23, because the real estate is to be acquired in perpetuity and the sale must be final and incontestable. *Ksitah* (mentioned again only in Job 42:11) is not a coin but an unknown unit of weight; coinage does not appear in the Bible until after the period of the monarchy.

20. He set up an altar Unlike the other altars erected by the patriarchs, this altar is neither in response to a revelation nor for use in worship. Rather, it is a pillar celebrating the safe arrival home after a prolonged absence filled with peril and crises and commemorating the change of name from Jacob to Israel.

El-elohe-yisrael Literally, “God, God of Israel.” “Israel” in this name refers to the patriarch, not the people.

THE RAVISHING OF DINAH (34:1–31)

THE ASSAULT (vv. 1–7)

1. Dinah The information about her parentage, known from Gen. 30:21, is repeated here to clarify the role that Simeon and Levi, her full brothers, will play in the ensuing tragic drama.

went out Girls of marriageable age normally would not leave a rural encampment to venture alone into an alien city. The narrative subtly crit-

icizes Dinah’s highly unconventional behavior through its use of the Hebrew stem meaning “to go out” (יצא). This has been interpreted by some medieval and modern commentators as a reference to some coquettish or promiscuous conduct.

the daughters of the land This phrase too carries undertones of disapproval, as is clear from 24:3,37.

CHAPTER 34

1. Incidents like the rape of Dinah were probably not uncommon, yet Jacob’s family seems unprepared for such an event and does not know how to react. Dinah, an only daughter raised in a family of men, was seeking the company of other young women. Although

some commentators blame her for leaving the security of her home to consort with strangers, the modern reader will likely reject this effort to blame the victim and minimize the responsibility of the assailant. Characteristically, the narrative describes the actions of men, but never tells us what Dinah thought nor how she felt about what happened.

ters of the land. ²Shechem son of Hamor the Hivite, chief of the country, saw her, and took her and lay with her by force. ³Being strongly drawn to Dinah daughter of Jacob, and in love with the maiden, he spoke to the maiden tenderly. ⁴So Shechem said to his father Hamor, “Get me this girl as a wife.”

⁵Jacob heard that he had defiled his daughter Dinah; but since his sons were in the field with his cattle, Jacob kept silent until they came home. ⁶Then Shechem’s father Hamor came out to Jacob to speak to him. ⁷Meanwhile Jacob’s sons, having heard the news, came in from the field. The men were distressed and

וַיֵּרָא אֹתָהּ שָׁכֵם בֶּן־חַמּוֹר הַחִוִּי נָשִׂיא
הָאֲרָץ וַיִּקַּח אֹתָהּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיַּעֲנֶה:
³וַיִּתְדַבֵּק נַפְשׁוֹ בְּדִינָה בַת־יַעֲקֹב וַיֵּאָהֵב
אֶת־הַנַּעֲרָה הַנְּעִרָה וַיְדַבֵּר עִלְיָב הַנַּעֲרָה
הַנְּעִרָה: ⁴וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁכֵם אֶל־חַמּוֹר אָבִיו
לֵאמֹר קַח־לִי אֶת־הַיְלָדָה הַזֹּאת לְאִשָּׁה:
⁵וַיַּעֲקֹב שָׁמַע כִּי טָמָא אֶת־דִּינָה בָתּוֹ
וּבָנָיו הָיוּ אֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ בַשָּׂדֶה וְהַחֲרֹשׁ
יַעֲקֹב עַד־בָּאָם: ⁶וַיֵּצֵא חַמּוֹר אָבִי־שָׁכֵם
אֶל־יַעֲקֹב לְדַבֵּר אִתּוֹ: ⁷וּבָנָי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ
מִן־הַשָּׂדֶה בְּשִׁמְעָם וַיִּתְעַצְבוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים

2. Shechem son of Hamor The city-state of Shechem appears to have had a mixed population and may have been established through a confederacy of various clans.

chief Hamor is called “chief” (*nasi*), whereas the head of a Canaanite city-state generally was called “king.” Hamor’s unusual title reflects the fact that the ruler of Shechem had dominion over rural—that is, tribal—territory as well as the urban center, in this case a confederacy of various ethnic elements. Such a complex situation did not permit the absolute power of a king.

of the country Not “the city,” because the city-state of Shechem in pre-Israelite times extended its control over a vast area. At one time, it governed the central hill country as far as the borders of Jerusalem and Gezer to the south and Megiddo to the north, a domain of about 1,000 square miles.

took . . . lay . . . force Three Hebrew verbs of increasing severity underscore the brutality of Shechem’s assault on Dinah.

3. drawn . . . love . . . spoke Three expressions of affection describe Shechem’s feelings after the deed. He is hopelessly enamored of Dinah.

4. to his father Marriage arrangements were negotiated by a father on behalf of the son.

Get me Literally, “take for me.” The same Hebrew stem, לקח, is used in verse 2 for the ab-

duction. This “taking” is to make amends for the other.

5. that he had defiled The subject is Shechem of verse 4. He was guilty not only of an offense against the dignity of the girl but of an assault on the honor of the family.

Jacob kept silent The need to exercise restraint, pending the arrival of his sons, is understandable, but his passivity throughout the entire incident is noteworthy.

6. Hamor came out Apparently, Hamor arrives before the brothers and is left cooling his heels until they come home. Shechem has accompanied his father, but remains in the background until it is opportune for him to appear.

to speak to him To begin marriage negotiations.

7. having heard the news It seems that Jacob urgently summoned his sons.

an outrage The Hebrew word “*n’valah*” is a powerful noun describing offenses of such profound abhorrence that they threaten to tear apart the fabric of Israelite society. For society’s own self-protection, such atrocities can never be tolerated or left unpunished.

Israel This is an anachronism. The narrator may be saying that the sacred, inviolable norms that constituted the moral underpinnings of the later people of Israel were already prevalent at this time.

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34:2 *by force* Jewish law prohibits forcing sexual relations on another (e.g., BT Ket. 39a–b; see also Comments to Deut. 22:23–25, 28–29.)

very angry, because he had committed an outrage in Israel by lying with Jacob’s daughter—a thing not to be done.

⁸And Hamor spoke with them, saying, “My son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him in marriage. ⁹Intermarry with us: give your daughters to us, and take our daughters for yourselves: ¹⁰You will dwell among us, and the land will be open before you; settle, move about, and acquire holdings in it.” ¹¹Then Shechem said to her father and brothers, “Do me this favor, and I will pay whatever you tell me. ¹²Ask of me a bride-price ever so high, as well as gifts, and I will pay what you tell me; only give me the maiden for a wife.”

¹³Jacob’s sons answered Shechem and his father Hamor—speaking with guile because he had defiled their sister Dinah—¹⁴and said to them, “We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to a man who is uncircumcised, for that is a disgrace among us. ¹⁵Only on this condition will we agree with you; that you will become

וַיַּחַר לָהֶם מְאֹד כִּי־נִבְלָה עָשָׂה בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל לְשֹׂכֵב אֶת־בַּת־יַעֲקֹב וְכֵן לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה׃
⁸וַיְדַבֵּר חָמוֹר אֲתֶם לֵאמֹר שְׁכֶם בְּנֵי חָשֶׁקָה נָפְשׁוּ בְּבַתְכֶם תְּנוּ נָא אֶתְּהָ לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה׃
⁹וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ אִתָּנוּ בְּנֹתֵיכֶם תִּתְּנוּ־לָנוּ וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ תִקְחוּ לָכֶם׃
¹⁰וְאִתָּנוּ תִשְׁבוּ וְהָאָרֶץ תִּהְיֶה לְפָנֵיכֶם שְׁבוּ וּסְחָרוּ וְהֶאֱחָזוּ בָּהּ׃
¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁכֶם אֶל־אָבִיהָ וְאֶל־אֶחָיָהּ אֲמִצָּדֶחַן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם וְאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי אֶתֶּן׃
¹²הֲרַבּוּ עָלַי מְאֹד מִדָּהָר וּמִמֶּתֶן וְאֶתְּנָהּ כַּאֲשֶׁר תֹּאמְרוּ אֵלַי וּתְנוּ־לִי אֶת־הַנְּעִר הַנֹּעֲרָה לְאִשָּׁה׃
¹³וַיַּעֲנוּ בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב אֶת־שְׁכֶם וְאֶת־חָמוֹר אָבִיו בְּמַרְמָה וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֲשֶׁר טָמְא אֶת דִּינָה אֶחָתָם׃
¹⁴וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵיהֶם לֹא נוּכַל לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה לְתַת' אֶת־אֶחָתָנוּ לְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ עֶרְלָה כִּי־חָרְפָה הוּא לָנוּ׃
¹⁵אֲךָ־בְּזָאת נָאוֹת לָכֶם אִם

a thing not to be done Not among the people Israel, not in any civilized society.

THE SPEECHES OF HAMOR AND SHECHEM (vv. 8–12)

Jacob, an alien seminomad, probably cannot claim redress against the ruler of the city. Hamor deals with the family only because his son wishes to marry Dinah. The terms he offers are intended to induce Jacob and his sons to let the incident be forgotten.

10. move about To trade and barter and to have unlimited grazing rights.

acquire holdings Certainly the most valuable of the privileges offered and also a pointed reminder to Jacob of his disadvantaged position as an alien.

12. bride-price The Hebrew word *mohar* refers to the payment made by the prospective husband in return for the bride. The amount is usually fixed by custom. Shechem’s readiness to pay far beyond that is a tacit recognition of the need to make reparations.

gifts The ceremonial gifts made to the bride’s family.

THE BROTHERS’ RESPONSE (vv. 13–17)

Although outwardly polite, Hamor, in effect, has attributed to Jacob and his sons a sordid, mercenary concern that adds insult to injury.

13. with guile The narrator informs us that the brothers’ acceptance of intermarriage with the Shechemites is a ruse. Dinah, who is still being held by the perpetrator (vv. 17,26), cannot be liberated by a tiny minority in the face of overwhelming odds—except by cunning.

he had defiled This reminder of the enormity of the offense places the brothers’ “guile” in its proper perspective.

their sister In verses 1 and 5 Dinah is described as the daughter of Jacob. Here and in verse 27 she is linked to her brothers. The phrase serves to dissociate the patriarch from their plans and to stress the obligation that falls on brothers in this type of society.

14. uncircumcised Circumcision is the essential precondition for admittance into the community of Israel; see 17:9–14 and Exod. 12:43–49.

like us in that every male among you is circumcised. ¹⁶Then we will give our daughters to you and take your daughters to ourselves; and we will dwell among you and become as one kindred. ¹⁷But if you will not listen to us and become circumcised, we will take our daughter and go.”

¹⁸Their words pleased Hamor and Hamor’s son Shechem. ¹⁹And the youth lost no time in doing the thing, for he wanted Jacob’s daughter. Now he was the most respected in his father’s house. ²⁰So Hamor and his son Shechem went to the public place of their town and spoke to their fellow townsmen, saying, ²¹“These people are our friends; let them settle in the land and move about in it, for the land is large enough for them; we will take their daughters to ourselves as wives and give our daughters to them. ²²But only on this condition will the men agree with us to dwell among us and be as one kindred: that all our males become circumcised as they are circumcised. ²³Their cattle and substance and all their beasts will be ours, if we only agree to their terms, so

תהיו כִּמְנוּ לְהַמּוּל לָכֶם כְּלִזְכָּר: ¹⁶ וְנָתַנוּ אֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ לָכֶם וְאֶת־בָּנֵיכֶם נִקְחֵלְנוּ וְיִשְׁבְּנוּ אִתְּכֶם וְהָיִינוּ לְעַם אֶחָד: ¹⁷ וְאִם־לֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ אֵלֵינוּ לְהַמּוּל וְלִקְחוּ אֶת־בָּתְּנוּ וְהָלַכְנוּ:

¹⁸ וַיִּיטְבוּ דְבָרֵיהֶם בְּעֵינֵי חָמוֹר וּבְעֵינֵי שָׁכֶם בֶּן־חָמוֹר: ¹⁹ וְלֹא־אָחַר הַנְּעַר לַעֲשׂוֹת הַדָּבָר כִּי חָפֵץ בָּבַת־יַעֲקֹב וְהוּא נִכְבָּד מְכֹל בֵּית אָבִיו: ²⁰ וַיָּבֵא חָמוֹר וּשְׁכֶם בְּנוֹ אֶל־שַׁעַר עִירָם וַיְדַבְּרוּ אֶל־אֲנָשֵׁי עִירָם לֵאמֹר: ²¹ הֲאֵנָשִׁים הָאֵלֶּה שְׁלָמִים הֵם אִתָּנוּ וַיִּשְׁבוּ בְּאֶרֶץ וַיִּסְחְרוּ אִתָּהּ וְהָאֶרֶץ הִנֵּה רַחֲבַת־יָדַיִם לְפָנֵיהֶם אֶת־בָּנֵתְכֶם נִקְחֵלְנוּ לְנָשִׁים וְאֶת־בְּנֹתֵינוּ נָתַן לָהֶם: ²² אַךְ־בְּזָאת יֵאָתוּ לָנוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים לְשֶׁבֶת אִתָּנוּ לְהִיּוֹת לְעַם אֶחָד בְּהַמּוּל לָנוּ כְּלִזְכָּר כִּאֲשֶׁר הֵם נִמְלִים: ²³ מִקְנֵיהֶם וְקִנְיָנָם וְכָל־בְּהֵמָתָם הֲלוֹא

RESPONSE OF THE SHECHEMITES

(vv. 18–24)

19. lost no time The narrative is anticipating developments to indicate Shechem’s furious ardor. He hardly could have appeared at the public assembly had he just been circumcised.

the most respected As a role model for others, who were soon influenced by his initiative.

20. public place Literally, “the gate,” which served as the civic center.

their fellow townsmen Literally, “the men of their city,” the popular assembly of free citizens who must rule on major items of public business, such as granting special privileges to

an alien group. Such assemblies are well documented in ancient Near Eastern texts.

21. our friends The reference may be to some existing treaty arrangement between the city of Shechem and the clan of Jacob. City-states that dominated a wide area usually regulated their relationships with the nomadic groups within their domain by means of formal treaties.

23. will be ours Hamor here has omitted the promise of landed property rights for the newcomers and has inserted the assurance of dispossessing them of their belongings. As the occasion is a public ratification of the agreement, he is clearly guilty of double-dealing.

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34:15 circumcised This is the earliest source stating that non-Jewish males require circumcision for conversion to Judaism. According to traditional Jewish standards affirmed in the Conservative Movement, all converts to Judaism must undergo immersion and males must undergo circumcision (*b'rit milah*) prior to immersion. In addition, males who have been circumcised medically must complete the requirements of the ritual by having a drop of blood drawn from the same site (*hatafat dam b'rit*).

that they will settle among us.”²⁴All who went out of the gate of his town heeded Hamor and his son Shechem, and all males, all those who went out of the gate of his town, were circumcised.

²⁵On the third day, when they were in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Jacob’s sons, brothers of Dinah, took each his sword, came upon the city unmolested, and slew all the males.²⁶They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword, took Dinah out of Shechem’s house, and went away.²⁷The other sons of Jacob came upon the slain and plundered the town, because their sister had been defiled.²⁸They seized their flocks and herds and asses, all that was inside the town and outside; ²⁹all their wealth, all their children, and their wives, all that was in the houses, they took as captives and booty.

לְנוּ הֵם אֶךְ נְאוֹתָהּ לָהֶם וַיִּשְׁבוּ אִתָּנוּ:
 וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ אֶל־חַמּוֹר וְאֶל־שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ כָּל־
 יִצְאֵי שַׁעַר עִירוֹ וַיִּמְלֹךְ כָּל־זָכָר כָּל־יִצְאֵי
 שַׁעַר עִירוֹ:

וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בַּהִיוֹתָם כְּאֲבִים
 וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי־בְנֵי־יַעֲקֹב שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֶחָי
 דִּינָה אִישׁ חָרְבוּ וַיָּבֹאוּ עַל־הָעִיר בְּטַח
 וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל־זָכָר: ²⁶וְאֶת־חַמּוֹר וְאֶת־שָׁכֶם
 בְּנוֹ הָרְגוּ לְפִי־חָרֵב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת־דִּינָה
 מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ: ²⁷בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב בָּאוּ
 עַל־הַחַלְלִים וַיִּבְזּוּ הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר טָמְאוּ
 אַחוֹתָם: ²⁸אֶת־צֹאֲנֵם וְאֶת־בָּקָרָם וְאֶת־
 חֲמֹרֵיהֶם וְאֶת אֲשֶׁר־בַּעִיר וְאֶת־אֲשֶׁר
 בַּשָּׂדֶה לָקְחוּ: ²⁹וְאֶת־כָּל־חֵילָם וְאֶת־
 כָּל־טַפָּם וְאֶת־נְשֵׁיהֶם שָׁבוּ וַיִּבְזּוּ וְאֶת־
 כָּל־אֲשֶׁר בַּבַּיִת:

24. All who went out of the gate The phrase might refer to all the free citizens of the city or, in this instance, the males of military age—the group available for intermarriage with Jacob’s clan.

THE RETRIBUTION (vv. 25–29)

25. On the third day By now all the males have been circumcised.

Simeon and Levi Dinah’s full brothers, who would feel most keenly her brutal humiliation.

took each his sword To avenge the violence of Shechem, who “took” Dinah (Gen. 34:2).

unmolested The Hebrew word translated as “unmolested” (*betah*) may here have the sense of “meeting no resistance” or “confidently.” Or it

may refer to the city as “unsuspecting, caught off guard.”

26. took Dinah . . . went away The entire affair began with Dinah “going out” and being “taken” (vv. 1,2). It concludes with the same two Hebrew verbs, but in reverse order. As far as Simeon and Levi are concerned, their account with Shechem is settled. They take no part in the plunder of the city.

27. The other sons The other brothers seize the opportunity to pillage, but they do not destroy the city.

because The narrator stresses the point that the brothers were stirred to action because of the defilement of their sister, not for the sake of booty. See, however, 49:5 where Jacob denounces them for this act.

25. This unsavory episode, coming after Jacob’s struggle with the angel and his reconciliation with Esau, might warn us that although Jacob may have outgrown his tendency to deceive, his children were shaped by the person he had been during their formative years. Maimonides justifies the slaughter of the men of Shechem on the grounds that they became implicated in the serious crime of the rapist by

not punishing him (MT Kings 9:14). Others posit that the Shechemites were all guilty of similar behavior and deserving of death. Hirsch calls the behavior of Simeon and Levi “acts which are deserving of censure and for which we are under no obligation to find an excuse.” We can understand the wish for revenge against a numerically superior people without having to justify the tactics of Jacob’s sons.

³⁰Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “You have brought trouble on me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; my men are few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my house will be destroyed.”
³¹But they answered, “Should our sister be treated like a whore?”

35 God said to Jacob, “Arise, go up to Bethel and remain there; and build an altar there to the God who appeared to you when you were fleeing from your brother Esau.”² So Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Rid yourselves of the alien gods in

JACOB’S REACTION (vv. 30–31)

Jacob intervenes for the first time, berating Simeon and Levi.

30. brought trouble Literally, “muddied (the waters).”

THE BETHEL TRADITION (35:1–15)

The narratives with Jacob at the center come to a close with this chapter. From now on his life will be intertwined with that of Joseph.

THE PILGRIMAGE TO BETHEL (vv. 1–7)

Jacob, seized with panic after his sons’ massacre of the Shechemites, fears reprisals from the neighboring peoples, who may have been bound to Shechem by treaty obligations. God’s intervention transforms the patriarch’s flight into a dignified pilgrimage to Bethel.

1. Arise, go up The words befit the dignified pace of a pilgrimage and the fact that Bethel lies about 1,000 feet (300 m) higher than Shechem.

remain there For as long as he chooses. Jacob does not remain long in Bethel, though. He soon continues to journey southward.

30 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-שִׁמְעוֹן וְאֶל-לֵוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישְׁנִי בִישָׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּפִנְעָנִי וּבְפִרְזֵי וְאֲנִי מִתֵּי מְסֻפָּר וְנֹאֲסָפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי: 31 וַיֹּאמְרוּ הַכּוֹזְנֵה * יַעֲשֶׂה אֶת-אֲחֻרָּנּוּ: פ

לה וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל-יַעֲקֹב קוּם עֲלֵה בֵית-אֵל וְשָׁב-שָׁם וַעֲשֵׂה-שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הַנִּרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ בְּבָרְחֶךָ מִפְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אַחֶיךָ: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶל-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עִמּוֹ הִסְרוּ אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי הַנִּכְר אֲשֶׁר

31. v. 1 ז רבתי לפי מהדורת לעטעריס

making me odious Literally, “making my breath to stink.”

31. But they answered The two brothers have the last word. The women of the Israelites are not to be dishonored.

build an altar The construction of altars by the Patriarchs is an act of homage and loyalty to God. Building an altar at a site known as sacred to pagans indicates that the patriarch is dissociating the sanctity of the site from its pagan antecedents. Bethel had a long Canaanite prehistory.

the God The Hebrew name *el*, and not the regular *elohim*, is deliberately used here because it evokes Bethel, as in 31:13. Jacob is reminded that he has not yet fulfilled the vow made at Bethel (28:20–22).

2. all who were with him Including the captives taken at Shechem.

Rid yourselves Jacob vowed at Bethel that if he returned safely from his exile, “the LORD shall be my God.” Thus, before embarking on the pilgrimage to that city, he formally renounces

CHAPTER 35

2. Alien gods in your midst Jacob’s directive

comes after his sons’ massacre at Shechem (34:25–29). Might he be referring here to his sons’ taste for extrajudicial vengeance?

your midst, purify yourselves, and change your clothes.³ Come, let us go up to Bethel, and I will build an altar there to the God who answered me when I was in distress and who has been with me wherever I have gone.”⁴ They gave to Jacob all the alien gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that was near Shechem.⁵ As they set out, a terror from God fell on the cities round about, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob.

⁶Thus Jacob came to Luz—that is, Bethel—in the land of Canaan, he and all the people who were with him. ⁷There he built an altar and named the site El-bethel, for it was there that God had revealed Himself to him when he was fleeing from his brother.

⁸Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died, and was

בְּתַכְכֶּם וְהִטְהַרוּ וְהַחֲלִיפוּ שְׂמַלְתֵיכֶם:
 וְנִקְוֹמָה וְנִעְלָה בֵּית־אֵל וְאֶעֱשֶׂה־שָׁם
 מִזְבֵּחַ לְאֵל הָעֲנָה אֲתִי בְּיוֹם צָרָתִי וַיְהִי
 עִמּוֹדֵי בְדֶרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר הִלְכְתִּי: ⁴ וַיִּתְּנוּ אֶל־
 יַעֲקֹב אֵת כָּל־אֱלֹהֵי הַנְּכַר אֲשֶׁר בְּיָדָם
 וְאֶת־הַנְּזֻטִּים אֲשֶׁר בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם וַיִּטְמְנוּ אֹתָם
 יַעֲקֹב תַּחַת תְּרֵחַת הָאֵלָה אֲשֶׁר עִם־שָׁכֶם:
⁵ וַיִּסְעוּ וַיְהִי חַתַּת אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָעָרִים
 אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבוֹתֵיהֶם וְלֹא רָדְפוּ אַחֲרֵי בְנֵי
 יַעֲקֹב:

⁶ וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב לְלוּזָה אֲשֶׁר בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנַעַן הוּא
 בֵּית־אֵל הוּא וְכָל־הָעַם אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ: ⁷ וַיִּבֶן
 שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ וַיִּקְרָא לְמָקוֹם אֵל בֵּית־אֵל כִּי
 שָׁם נִגְלוּ אֵלָיו הָאֱלֹהִים בְּבָרְחוֹ מִפְּנֵי
 אָחִיו:

⁸ וַתָּמָת דְּבָרָה מִיַּנְקַת רַבָּקָה וַתִּקָּבֵר

“alien gods.” For the first time in the Bible, there is tension between the religion of Israel and that of its neighbors.

alien gods These were probably household gods found among the spoils of Shechem or carried by the captives. Perhaps they included the *īrafim* that Rachel stole (31:19).

purify yourselves They were to immerse themselves in water, to remove the bodily impurity acquired through contact with corpses at Shechem and to prepare them for the impending pilgrimage to Bethel, where they will enter sacred space.

change your clothes Laundering is a precondition of purification. Putting on fresh clothes is a stricter requirement and signifies a transition from one state to another.

3. who answered me when I was in distress Jacob omits the unpleasant details mentioned in verse 1. As befits the occasion, his language is a poetic acknowledgment of God’s beneficence.

4. the rings These were no ordinary pieces

of jewelry but apparently talismans adorned with pagan symbols.

buried them This procedure is found nowhere else in the Bible’s laws and narratives relating to the disposal of pagan images. The method prescribed in Deut. 7:5,25 is not burial but utter destruction.

5. a terror Jacob’s earlier fears turn out to be groundless. The nearby city-states are themselves petrified.

6. Luz The earlier name of the city, according to Gen. 28:19.

7. the site The Hebrew word *makom* here means “sacred site.”

El-bethel Literally, “the God of Bethel,” that is, the one whose associations with Jacob were repeatedly bound up with Bethel.

THE DEATH OF DEBORAH (v. 8)

8. Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died The demise of a woman is reported only in exceptional cases in the Torah. It is likely that traditions about Deborah (which would make the context of the present notice intelligible) were

8. Deborah, Rebekah’s nurse, died Ramban sees this as a veiled announcement of Rebekah’s death (which is unmentioned in the

Torah). Rashi cites a tradition that Rebekah had sent Deborah to Aram to tell Jacob that it was now safe to return.

buried under the oak below Bethel; so it was named Allon-bacuth.

⁹God appeared again to Jacob on his arrival from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

¹⁰God said to him,

“You whose name is Jacob,
You shall be called Jacob no more,
But Israel shall be your name.”

Thus He named him Israel.

¹¹And God said to him,

“I am El Shaddai.

Be fertile and increase;

A nation, yea an assembly of nations,

Shall descend from you.

Kings shall issue from your loins.

¹²The land that I assigned to Abraham
and Isaac

I assign to you;

And to your offspring to come

Will I assign the land.”

¹³God parted from him at the spot where He had spoken to him; ¹⁴and Jacob set up a pillar at the site where He had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he offered a libation on it and poured oil upon it. ¹⁵Jacob gave the site, where God had spoken to him, the name of Bethel.

widely known to reader and narrator alike in biblical times but for some reason were not included in the Torah.

THE REVELATION AT BETHEL (vv. 9–15)

Jacob has fulfilled the divine charge given in verse 1. God now answers the prayer offered by Isaac in 28:3–4, as Jacob departs for Haran. The words of God echo the promises made to Abraham, as recorded in 17:1–8.

10. called Jacob no more The name change was not effected by God but by an angelic being on the other side of the Jordan (32:28–29). God now validates his new name (Israel) in the promised land.

11. I am El Shaddai As in 17:1.

מִתַּחַת לְבֵית־אֵל תַּחַת הָאֲלוֹן וַיִּקְרָא
שְׁמוֹ אֲלוֹן בְּכוּת: פ

⁹וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶל־יַעֲקֹב עוֹד בְּבֹאוֹ מִפָּדָן
אֶרֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ: ¹⁰וַיֹּאמֶר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים

שְׁמֶךָ יַעֲקֹב
לֹא־יִקְרָא שְׁמֶךָ עוֹד יַעֲקֹב

כִּי אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל יִהְיֶה שְׁמֶךָ

וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

¹¹וַיֹּאמֶר לּוֹ אֱלֹהִים

אֲנִי אֵל שַׁדַּי

פְּרֹה וּרְבֵה

גּוֹי וְקַהֲל גּוֹיִם

יִהְיֶה מִמֶּךָ

וּמַלְכִים מִחֻלְצֶיךָ יֵצְאוּ:

¹²וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם

וְלִיְצָחָק

לְךָ אֶתְנַנֶּה

וְלִזְרַעֲךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ

אֶתֶּן אֶת־הָאָרֶץ:

¹³וַיַּעַל מֵעֵלְיוֹ אֱלֹהִים בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר

אֹתוֹ: ¹⁴וַיֵּצֵב יַעֲקֹב מִצֵּבָה בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־

דִּבֶּר אֹתוֹ מִצֵּבֶת אַבְן וַיִּסֹּף עָלֶיהָ נֹסֶף

וַיִּצַק עָלֶיהָ שָׁמֶן: ¹⁵וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶת־

שֵׁם הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֹתוֹ שֵׁם אֱלֹהִים

בֵּית־אֵל:

Be fertile and increase See 17:2,6.

A nation, yea an assembly of nations See 17:4–6.

Kings shall issue from your loins See 17:6.

12. The land See 17:8.

13. God parted from him Literally, “God ascended from upon him,” that is, the revelation came to an end.

14. Jacob set up a pillar This stone pillar commemorates the experience. It is either a re-dedication of the original pillar (28:18) or a new one.

15. Bethel No interpretation of the name is given. A *beit el* was a specific type of stone pillar: a monitor and witness commemorating the divine presence. See Comments to 28:17–18.

¹⁶They set out from Bethel; but when they were still some distance short of Ephrath, Rachel was in childbirth, and she had hard labor. ¹⁷When her labor was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Have no fear, for it is another boy for you.” ¹⁸But as she breathed her last—for she was dying—she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin. ¹⁹Thus Rachel died. She was buried on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem. ²⁰Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar; it is the pillar at Rachel’s grave to this day. ²¹Israel journeyed on, and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-eder.

וַיִּסְעוּ מִבֵּית אֵל וַיְהִי עוֹד כְּבָרַת-
הָאָרֶץ לָבוֹא אֶפְרַתָּה וַתֵּלֶד רָחֵל וַתִּקַּשׁ
בְּלִדְתָּהּ: ¹⁷וַיְהִי בְּהִקְשָׁתָהּ בְּלִדְתָּהּ
וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ הַמִּיֻלָּדֶת אֶל-תִּירְאִי כִּי-גַם-
זֶה לָךְ בֵּן: ¹⁸וַיְהִי בִצְאֹת נַפְשָׁהּ כִּי מָתָה
וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ בֶן-אֹנִי וְאָבִיו קָרָא-לוֹ
בְּנִימִין: ¹⁹וַתָּמָת רָחֵל וַתִּקְבֹּר בְּדֶרֶךְ
אֶפְרַתָּה הִוא בֵּית לָחֶם: ²⁰וַיִּצֵב יַעֲקֹב
מִצֵּבָה עַל-קְבֻרָתָהּ הִוא מִצֵּבַת קְבֻרַת-
רָחֵל עַד-הַיּוֹם: ²¹וַיִּסַּע יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּט אֵהָלָה
אֲהָלוֹ מֵהַלָּאָה לְמִגְדַל-עֵדֶר:

THE DEATH OF RACHEL;
THE BIRTH OF BENJAMIN (vv. 16–20)

17. Have no fear Rachel is comforted in her dying moments by the knowledge that God answered the prayer she had uttered after the birth of Joseph: “May the LORD add another son for me.”

18. Ben-oni The name is understood to mean “son of my sorrow.”

THE TOMB OF RACHEL (vv. 19–20)

20. Jacob set up a pillar A stone memorial

to mark her grave. “The tomb of Rachel” was a landmark already in the time of Samuel, ca. 1020 B.C.E. (1 Sam. 10:2). The traditional site lies about 4 miles (6.5 km) south of Jerusalem and 1 mile (1.6 km) north of Bethlehem.

REUBEN’S WANTON CHALLENGE
(vv. 21–22)

21. Migdal-eder The name means “herd tower” and designates a structure built to provide protection against raiders of the flocks.

19. Rachel wants to name the child Ben-Oni, “child of pain” or (according to Maimonides) “child of mourning.” Jacob overrules her deathbed wish and names him Benjamin, “child of strength” (or perhaps “child of long life”). He wants the child to remind him of Rachel’s strength and courage, not of her pain and death, and does not want Benjamin to grow up feeling responsible for his mother’s death.

on the road to Ephrath—now Bethlehem But Bethlehem is only a short distance from Hebron and the burial tomb of the Patriarchs at Machpelah! Perhaps Jacob realized that burying Rachel in Machpelah, leaving only one

grave for himself, would stir the jealous rage of Leah with whom he would still have to live for many years. The apocryphal Book of Jubilees would have us believe that Jacob grew to love Leah in the course of time and grieved deeply for her when she died. On his deathbed, Jacob will remember with rueful guilt having buried Rachel by the roadside near Ephrath (Gen. 48:7).

Centuries later, when Babylonia conquered the Land of Israel and sent its population into exile, the road that the Judeans took out of Jerusalem led past the site of Rachel’s burial. The prophet Jeremiah pictured Rachel calling out to God from her grave, imploring God to forgive

HALAKHAH L’MA-ASEH

35:20 pillar It is Jewish custom to mark the grave with a monument. An unveiling ceremony to dedicate the monument, while not universally observed, may be held any time after *shivah* (the first week after the funeral). Customs vary: *Sfardim* commonly dedicate the stone at the end of *sh’loshim* (the first 30 days of mourning), and many *Ashk’nazim* in Israel follow that practice as well; *Ashk’nazim* in the Diaspora usually dedicate the monument sometime near the first *yortsayt* (*yahrzeit*; Yiddish for the anniversary of death).

²²While Israel stayed in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine; and Israel found out.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve in number. ²³The sons of Leah: Reuben—Jacob's first-born—Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. ²⁴The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁵The sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maid: Dan and Naphtali. ²⁶And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maid: Gad and Asher. These are the sons of Jacob who were born to him in Paddan-aram.

²⁷And Jacob came to his father Isaac at Mamre, at Kiriath-arba—now Hebron—where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned. ²⁸Isaac was a hundred and eighty years old ²⁹when he breathed his last and died. He was gathered to his kin in ripe old age; and he was buried by his sons Esau and Jacob.

וַיְהִי בְשֹׁכֵן יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ הַהוּא וַיִּלְכָּד
רְאוּבֵן וַיִּשְׁכַּב אֶת-בִּלְהָהּ פִּילְגֶשֶׁת אִבִּיו
וַיִּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל * פ

וַיְהִי בְנֵי-יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר: ²³ בְּנֵי לֵאָה
בְּכוֹר יַעֲקֹב רְאוּבֵן וְשִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי וַיְהוּדָה
וַיִּשְׁשֹׁכָר וּזְבֻלוֹן: ²⁴ בְּנֵי רָחֵל יוֹסֵף
וּבְנֵימִן: ²⁵ וּבְנֵי בִלְהָהּ שְׁפָחַת רָחֵל הֵן
דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי: ²⁶ וּבְנֵי זִלְפָּה שְׁפָחַת לֵאָה גָד
וְאַשֶׁר אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר יָלְדָּלוּ בְּפַדְן
אַרָּם:

וַיָּבֵא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-יִצְחָק אָבִיו מִמְרָא
קְרִית הָאֲרָבָע הוּא חֶבְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר-גָּר-שָׁם
אַבְרָהָם וַיִּצְחָק: ²⁸ וַיְהִי יָמָיו יִצְחָק מֵאָת
שָׁנָה וּשְׁמֹנִים שָׁנָה: ²⁹ וַיָּגַע יִצְחָק וַיָּמָת
וַיִּאָּסֶף אֶל-עַמּוּיָו זָקֵן וּשְׁבַע יָמִים וַיִּקְבְּרוּ
אֹתוֹ עֶשָׂו וַיַּעֲקֹב בְּנָיו: פ

v. 22. למדינחאי טוף פסוק. ולמעראי פיסקא באמצע פסוק

22. Reuben went and lay with Bilhah In the ancient Near East, possession of the concubine(s) of one's father bestowed legitimacy on the assumption of heirship. Reuben's move—a calculated challenge to his father's authority—is a political, not a lustful act.

Israel found out Literally, “heard.” One expects an immediate reaction to the offense, but none occurs. There is certainly much more to this story than is revealed here, but the narrator chose to omit the unpleasant details. The episode ends abruptly.

Now the sons of Jacob were twelve With the birth of Benjamin, the family of Jacob is complete, and it is appropriate to list it in full, particularly because a following passage will feature the genealogies of Esau. The roster also indicates that, despite Reuben's misdeed, the unity of the family remained intact.

26. in Paddan-aram The reader is expected to exclude Benjamin, who was not born there.

THE DEATH OF ISAAC (vv. 27–29)

The report of Isaac's death, which is not in chronologic sequence, is placed here to reintroduce Esau and provide a connective with the next chapter.

27. Hebron The family moved here from Beer-sheba (Gen. 28:10).

29. he was buried The place of interment was the cave of Machpelah, where Rebekah had been buried, as is made clear in 49:29–32.

Esau and Jacob Here the names are in order of seniority. In the account of Abraham's burial (25:9), the order of the sons is reversed, because Ishmael was the son of a handmaid.

Israel's turning to rival idols even as she had been willing to share her husband's love with a rival. God promises Rachel that her children

will one day return to their own land (Jer. 31:15–17, part of the *haftarah* for the second day of *Rosh ha-Shanah*).

36 This is the line of Esau—that is, Edom.

²Esau took his wives from among the Canaanite women—Adah daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon the Hivite—³and also Basemath daughter of Ishmael and sister of Nebaioth. ⁴Adah bore to Esau Eliphaz; Basemath bore Reuel; ⁵and Oholibamah bore Jeshu, Jalam, and Korah. Those were the sons of Esau, who were born to him in the land of Canaan.

⁶Esau took his wives, his sons and daughters, and all the members of his household, his cattle and all his livestock, and all the property that he had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to another land because of his brother Jacob. ⁷For their possessions were too many for them to dwell together, and the land where they sojourned could not support them because of their livestock. ⁸So Esau settled in the hill country of Seir—Esau being Edom.

לו

וְאֵלֶּה הַלְלוֹת עֵשָׂו הוּא אֲדוֹם:

²עֵשָׂו לָקַח אֶת־נָשָׁיו מִבְּנוֹת כְּנָעַן אֶת־עֵדָה בַּת־אֵילֹון הַחִתִּי וְאֶת־אֹהֲלִיבָמָה בַּת־עֵנָה בַּת־צִבְעוֹן הַחִוִּי: ³וְאֶת־בַּשְׂמַת בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל אַחֹת נְבִיּוֹת: ⁴וְתָלַד עֵדָה לְעֵשָׂו אֶת־אֶלְיָפֹז וּבַשְׂמַת יָלְדָה אֶת־רְעוּאֵל: ⁵וְאֹהֲלִיבָמָה יָלְדָה אֶת־יְעִישׁ יְעוּשׁ וְאֶת־יַעְלָם וְאֶת־קָרַח אֵלֶּה בְנֵי עֵשָׂו אֲשֶׁר יָלְדוּ־לוֹ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן:

⁶וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת־נָשָׁיו וְאֶת־בָּנָיו וְאֶת־בְּנֹתָיו וְאֶת־כָּל־נַפְשׁוֹת בֵּיתוֹ וְאֶת־מִקְנֵהוּ וְאֶת־כָּל־בְּהֵמָתוֹ וְאֶת־כָּל־קִנְיָנוֹ אֲשֶׁר רָכַשׁ בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן וַיֵּלֶךְ אֶל־אֶרֶץ מִפְּנֵי יַעֲקֹב אָחִיו: ⁷כִּי־הָיָה רְכוּשָׁם רַב מִשָּׁבַת יַחְדָּו וְלֹא יָכְלָה אֶרֶץ מְגוּרֵיהֶם לְשֹׂאת אֹתָם מִפְּנֵי מְקִנְיָהֶם: ⁸וַיֵּשֶׁב עֵשָׂו בְּהַר שֵׁעִיר עֵשָׂו הוּא אֲדוֹם:

THE LINE OF ESAU (36:1–43)

In this chapter all mention of Esau in the Book of Genesis is brought to an end with the listing of his descendants. The genealogical tables here also show how the divine oracle and patriarchal blessing bestowed on Esau (25:23; 27:39–40) were fulfilled.

ESAU’S WIVES AND SONS IN CANAAN
(vv. 1–5)

The text, a detailed list of Esau’s three wives and the five sons they bore him in Canaan, reflects a confederation of three tribal groupings. Historically, the marriage notices tell the reader about the various ethnic relationships among the tribes and record the absorption of Canaanite clans into the sphere of Edom.

1. Edom The name, which is repeated another 10 times in this chapter, functions as the name of a person, a people, and a national territory.

2. Adah This is also the name of Lamech’s first wife (4:19–20).

Elon the Hittite According to 26:34, he had a daughter Basemath.

3. Basemath The name, like that of Ishmael’s son Mibsam (25:13) and of Abraham’s second wife Keturah (25:1), means “spice.” Like them, it suggests an involvement of the clan in the spice trade of the ancient Near East.

sister of Nebaioth In 28:9 the daughter of Ishmael whom Esau married, and who bears this same description, is named Mahalath.

THE MIGRATION TO SEIR (vv. 6–8)

Esau now moves his entire household and all his livestock out of Canaan and into the hill country of Seir, a territory southeast of the Dead Sea alongside the Arabah, which becomes the national territory of Esau/Edom.

6. went to another land The word “another,” not in the Hebrew text, is supplied by the Aramaic translations. The Syriac translation adds: “The land of Seir.”

because of his brother Jacob Esau recognizes Jacob’s right to the other side of the Jordan. Otherwise, he could have insisted that Jacob be the one to leave.

7. could not support them Esau’s migration

⁹This, then, is the line of Esau, the ancestor of the Edomites, in the hill country of Seir.

¹⁰These are the names of Esau's sons: Eliphaz, the son of Esau's wife Adah; Reuel, the son of Esau's wife Basemath. ¹¹The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. ¹²Timna was a concubine of Esau's son Eliphaz; she bore Amalek to Eliphaz. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Adah. ¹³And these were the sons of Reuel: Nathath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. Those were the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. ¹⁴And these were the sons of Esau's wife Oholibamah, daughter of Anah daughter of Zibeon: she bore to Esau Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

¹⁵These are the clans of the children of Esau. The descendants of Esau's first-born Eliphaz: the clans Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, ¹⁶Korah, Gatam, and Amalek; these are the clans of Eliphaz in the land of Edom. Those are the

9 וְאֵלֶּה תְּלֻדֹת עֵשָׂו אָבִי אֲדוֹם בְּהַר שְׂעִיר:

10 אֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי-עֵשָׂו אֲלִיפֹז בְּנֵי-עָדָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו רְעוּאֵל בְּנֵי-בְשֶׁמֶת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו:

11 וַיְהִיו בְּנֵי אֲלִיפֹז תִּימָן אוֹמֵר צְפוֹ וְגַעְתָּם וְקִנְזוֹ: ¹²וְתִמְנָע | הִיְתָה פִּילְגָשׁ לְאֲלִיפֹז בְּנֵי-עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְאֲלִיפֹז אֶת-

עַמְלָק אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עָדָה אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו: ¹³וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל נַחַת וְזֵרַח שְׁמָה וּמִזָּה אֵלֶּה הָיוּ בְּנֵי בְשֶׁמֶת אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו:

14 וְאֵלֶּה הָיוּ בְּנֵי אֹהֲלִיבָמָה בַת-עֵנָה בַת-צִבְעוֹן אֵשֶׁת עֵשָׂו וַתֵּלֶד לְעֵשָׂו אֶת-

יְעוּשׁ יַעֲוֹשׁ וְאֶת-יַעְלָם וְאֶת-קָרַח: ¹⁵אֵלֶּה אֲלוֹפֵי בְּנֵי-עֵשָׂו בְּנֵי אֲלִיפֹז בְּכוֹר עֵשָׂו אֲלוֹף תִּימָן אֲלוֹף אוֹמֵר אֲלוֹף צְפוֹ אֲלוֹף קִנְזוֹ: ¹⁶אֲלוֹף-קָרַח אֲלוֹף גַּעְתָּם אֲלוֹף עַמְלָק אֵלֶּה אֲלוֹפֵי אֲלִיפֹז בְּאֶרֶץ

is determined by social and economic factors: overcrowding and insufficient natural resources.

ESAU'S DESCENDANTS IN SEIR (vv. 9–14)

This second genealogy of Esau repeats the details of the preceding one but continues the line to the third generation for Adah and Basemath. Only in this list is Amalek noted to be the son of a concubine and, as such, of inferior status. Excluding Amalek, there are 12 legitimate descendants in all, intimating a 12-tribe confederation, just like that of the Nahorites (22:20–24); the Ishmaelites (17:20; 25:13–16); and, of course, the Israelites, as recounted in 35:22–26.

11. Teman The name is the same as one of the most important places in Edom, identified with Tawilan, northeast of the Arab village of Elji on the eastern outskirts of Petra. It bears no relation to the Hebrew name *teiman* for Yemen.

12. Timna . . . Amalek According to verse 22, Timna was “the sister of Lotan,” an indigenous Horite. In historical terms, this means that the Edomites who migrated to Seir began to intermarry with the natives and that such alliances were not socially acceptable. This explains Timna's inferior status here as a concubine rather than as a wife.

THE ALLUFIM OF ESAU (vv. 15–19)

This is the third genealogy of Esau. Here Amalek is on a par with the other sons of Eliphaz, although in last place, which probably reflects a political development in Edomite tribal history. A section of the Korahites may have split off from the Oholibamah group and attached itself to the Eliphaz confederation, into which Amalek too was incorporated.

15. the clans The Hebrew word *elef* refers to a social unit, a subdivision of a tribe, most likely a clan. The term was meaningful in the premonarchic period (1200–1000 B.C.E.) before the breakdown of the tribal system.

THE INDIGENOUS HORITES OF SEIR

(vv. 20–30)

The information given in this chapter, taken in conjunction with the report of Deut. 2:12, adds up to a picture of a violent invasion of Seir by the Esau clan, followed by a process of gradual absorption of the native Horites into the “descendants of Esau.” We are now given a genealogy of Seir, who is regarded as the name-giving patriarch of the leading native clans, numbering seven in all.

descendants of Adah. ¹⁷And these are the descendants of Esau's son Reuel: the clans Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah; these are the clans of Reuel in the land of Edom. Those are the descendants of Esau's wife Basemath. ¹⁸And these are the descendants of Esau's wife Oholibamah: the clans Jeush, Jalam, and Korah; these are the clans of Esau's wife Oholibamah, the daughter of Anah. ¹⁹Those were the sons of Esau—that is, Edom—and those are their clans.

²⁰These were the sons of Seir the Horite, who were settled in the land: Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ²¹Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, the descendants of Seir, in the land of Edom.

²²The sons of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan's sister was Timna. ²³The sons of Shobal were these: Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. ²⁴The sons of Zibeon were these: Aiah and Anah—that was the Anah who discovered the hot springs in the wilderness while pasturing the asses of his father Zibeon. ²⁵The children of Anah were these: Dishon and Anah's daughter Oholibamah. ²⁶The sons of Dishon were these: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Cheran. ²⁷The sons of Ezer were these: Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan. ²⁸And the sons of Dishan were these: Uz and Aran.

²⁹These are the clans of the Horites: the clans Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, ³⁰Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. Those are the clans of the Horites, clan by clan, in the land of Seir.

אָדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי עֵדָה: ¹⁷וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי רְעוּאֵל
 בְּנֵי עֵשָׂו אֵלֶּה נְחֹת אֵלֶּה זְרַח אֵלֶּה שַׁמָּה
 אֵלֶּה מִיִּזָּח אֵלֶּה מְזָה רְעוּאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ
 אֲדוֹם אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בַשְׂמַת אִשְׁתּוֹ עֵשָׂו:
¹⁸וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי אֹהֶל־יִבְמָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עֵשָׂו אֵלֶּה
 יְעוּשׁ אֵלֶּה יַעֲלָם אֵלֶּה קְרַח אֵלֶּה אֹלְפִי
 אֹהֶל־יִבְמָה בַת־עֵנָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עֵשָׂו: ¹⁹אֵלֶּה
 בְּנֵי־עֵשָׂו וְאֵלֶּה אֹלְפֵיהֶם הוּא אֲדוֹם: ס
²⁰אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־שְׂעִיר הַחֲרִי יִשְׁבֵי הָאָרֶץ
 לֹטָן וְשׁוּבָל וְצַבְעוֹן וְעֵנָה: ²¹וְדִישׁוֹן
 וְאַצָּר וְדִישָׁן אֵלֶּה אֹלְפֵי הַחֲרִי בְּנֵי
 שְׂעִיר בְּאֶרֶץ אֲדוֹם:

²²וַיְהִי בְּנֵי־לֹטָן חֲרִי וְהִימָם וְאַחֹת
 לֹטָן תִּמְנָע: ²³וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי שׁוּבָל עֲלוֹן
 וּמְנַחַת וְעִיבָל שְׁפוֹ וְאוֹנָם: ²⁴וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־
 צַבְעוֹן וְאִיָּה וְעֵנָה הוּא עֵנָה אֲשֶׁר מָצָא
 אֶת־הַיַּמִּים בַּמִּדְבָּר בְּרַעֲתוֹ אֶת־הַחֲמָרִים
 לְצַבְעוֹן אָבִיו: ²⁵וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־עֵנָה דִישָׁן
 וְאֹהֶל־יִבְמָה בַת־עֵנָה: ²⁶וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי דִישָׁן
 חֶמְדָּן וְאַשְׁבֹּן וַיִּתְרֶן וַיִּכְרֶן: ²⁷אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־
 אֲצָר בְּלָהוֹן וְזַעֲזָן וְעֵקָן: ²⁸אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי־דִישָׁן
 עוּז וְאַרָן:

²⁹אֵלֶּה אֹלְפֵי הַחֲרִי אֵלֶּה לֹטָן אֵלֶּה
 שׁוּבָל אֵלֶּה צַבְעוֹן אֵלֶּה עֵנָה: ³⁰אֵלֶּה
 דִישָׁן אֵלֶּה אֲצָר אֵלֶּה דִישָׁן אֵלֶּה אֹלְפֵי
 הַחֲרִי לְאֹלְפֵיהֶם בְּאֶרֶץ שְׂעִיר: פ

20. the Horite This ethnic term is discussed in the Comment to Gen. 14:6.

22. Lotan's sister was Timna She is the concubine of Eliphaz (36:12).

24. Anah The mention of his discovery presupposes the reader's knowledge of the adventure. Obviously, there once was a widely known tale about this person.

the hot springs Another possible translation

of the unique Hebrew word translated as "the hot springs" (*ha-yeimim*) is "mules." This would make Anah the first to crossbreed the horse with the donkey to produce the hybrid mule.

25. Anah's daughter Oholibamah This note serves to differentiate this Oholibamah from Zibeon's granddaughter of the same name who married Esau (see v. 2).

28. Uz See Comment to 10:23.

³¹These are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites. ³²Bela son of Beor reigned in Edom, and the name of his city was Dinhabah. ³³When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah, from Bozrah, succeeded him as king. ³⁴When Jobab died, Husham of the land of the Temanites succeeded him as king. ³⁵When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad, who defeated the Midianites in the country of Moab, succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Avith. ³⁶When Hadad died, Samlah of Masrekah succeeded him as king. ³⁷When Samlah died, Saul of Rehoboth-on-the-river succeeded him as king. ³⁸When Saul died, Baal-hanan son of Achbor succeeded him as king. ³⁹And when Baal-hanan son of Achbor died, Hadar succeeded him as king; the name of his city was Pau, and his wife's name was Mehetabel daughter of Matred daughter of Me-zahab.

וַאֲלֵהֶם הַמְּלָכִים אֲשֶׁר מָלְכוּ בְּאֶרֶץ
 אֲדוֹם לִפְנֵי מֶלֶךְ-יִשְׂרָאֵל לִבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
 וַיְמַלֶּךְ בְּאֲדוֹם בֶּלַע בֶּן-בְּעוֹר וְשֵׁם
 עִירוֹ דִּנְחָבָה:³³ וַיָּמָת בֶּלַע וַיְמַלֶּךְ
 יוֹבָב בֶּן-זֶרַח מִבּוֹזְרָה:³⁴ וַיָּמָת
 יוֹבָב וַיְמַלֶּךְ תַּחְתָּיו חֹשָׁם מֵאֶרֶץ
 הַתֵּימָנִי:³⁵ וַיָּמָת חֹשָׁם וַיְמַלֶּךְ תַּחְתָּיו
 הָדָד בֶּן-בְּדָד הַמִּבְּעָה אֶת-מִדְיָן בְּשׂוּדָה
 מוֹאָב וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ עֵוִית:³⁶ וַיָּמָת הָדָד
 וַיְמַלֶּךְ תַּחְתָּיו שַׁמְלָה מִמַּשְׂרָקָה:
³⁷ וַיָּמָת שַׁמְלָה וַיְמַלֶּךְ תַּחְתָּיו שָׂאוּל
 מִרְחֹבוֹת הַנָּהָר:³⁸ וַיָּמָת שָׂאוּל וַיְמַלֶּךְ
 תַּחְתָּיו בַּעַל חָנָן בֶּן-עַכְבּוֹר:³⁹ וַיָּמָת
 בַּעַל חָנָן בֶּן-עַכְבּוֹר וַיְמַלֶּךְ תַּחְתָּיו הָדָר
 וְשֵׁם עִירוֹ פָּעוּ וְשֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ מְהֵיטָבָאֵל
 בַּת-מִטְרֵד בַּת מִי זָהָב:

THE EDMITE KINGS (vv. 31–39)

This list, which is not a genealogy, details eight kings who reigned in Edom before the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. The narrator probably used Edomite records as the source for the list.

31. before any king reigned over the Israelites That is, before the reign of Saul, first king of Israel, through whom the divine promises of kingship for Israel, recorded in 17:6 and 35:11, were first fulfilled.

33. Jobab In the Bible's ancient Jewish translation into Greek (Septuagint), the Book of Job carries an addendum that identifies Jobab with Job.

Bozrah This city was of such importance that it is sometimes equated with Edom as a whole. It is identified with modern Butseirah, some 30 miles (45 km) south-southeast of the Dead Sea and 35 miles (56 km) north of Petra.

34. the land of the Temanites See Comment to verse 11.

35. Hadad The name of an ancient Semitic storm god, later identified with Baal, head of the Canaanite pantheon.

Midianites This nomadic people, descendant of Abraham according to 25:2, spread out

in an arc from the Sinai Peninsula through the Negeb and northwestern Arabia.

36. Masrekah The name seems to indicate a grape-growing region, possibly the site known today as Jebel el-Mushrak.

37. Rehoboth-on-the-river "The river" in the Bible usually is the Euphrates, but this is very far from Edom. Here it may refer to Wadi el-Hesa, the border between Edom and Moab.

38. Baal-hanan He is the only king whose place-name is not given. The Edomite source material used by the narrator may have been defective here.

39. Hadar In the parallel list in 1 Chron. 1:50–57, as well as in numerous Hebrew manuscripts, the name appears as Hadad. This eighth Edomite king could have been an older contemporary of King Saul. By the time of David, Saul's successor, dynastic kingship existed in Edom.

his wife's name His father is not named, but the mention of his wife's mother and grandmother indicates that she had a very distinguished ancestry.

EDOMITE ALLUFIM (vv. 40–43)

This list, arranged by localities that are identical with the clan names, reflects administrative arrangements in Edom.

⁴⁰These are the names of the clans of Esau, each with its families and locality, name by name: the clans Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, ⁴¹Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, ⁴²Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, ⁴³Magdiel, and Iram. Those are the clans of Edom—that is, of Esau, father of the Edomites—by their settlements in the land which they hold.

41. Elah Elath on the Gulf of Aqaba. According to Deut. 2:8, this marked the southernmost boundary of Edom.

Pinon Punon, mentioned in Num. 33:42–43 as one of the stations of the Israelites during the wilderness wanderings. It is identified with Feinan, an important copper-mining area on the slopes of the hills of Edom, east of the 'Ara-

bah, about 20 miles (35 km) south of the Dead Sea.

42. Mibzar The name means “fortification” and is probably the same as Bozrah in verse 33.

43. which they hold Esau's story closes on this note. His death is not recorded.

מפסיר ⁴⁰וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת אֱלוֹפֵי עֵשָׂו לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם
 לְמִקְמוֹתָם בְּשֵׁמֹתָם אֱלוֹף תַּמְנַע אֱלוֹף
 עֵלוּהָ אֱלוֹף יִתֶּת: ⁴¹אֱלוֹף אֹהֶל־בָּמָה
 אֱלוֹף אֵלָה אֱלוֹף פִּינֹן: ⁴²אֱלוֹף קִנְזוֹ אֱלוֹף
 תִּימָן אֱלוֹף מִבְּצָר: ⁴³אֱלוֹף מַגְדִּי־אֵל אֱלוֹף
 עִירָם אֵלָה | אֱלוֹפֵי אֲדוֹם לְמִשְׁבְּתָם
 בְּאֶרֶץ אַחֲזֵתָם הוּא עֵשָׂו אָבִי אֲדוֹם: פ

הַפְּטָרָה וַיִּשְׁלַח

HAFTARAH FOR VA-YISHLAḤ

OBADIAH 1:1–21

The entire brief book of Obadiah is the *haftarah*. The prophecy is a message of judgment and promise.

The judgment focuses on the nation of Edom, whose downfall is proclaimed for their treachery against their “brother Israel” during the siege and destruction of the First Temple. Because Edom participated in the plunder, they shall be plundered in turn (v. 15). Given these allusions, most modern scholars concur that the work was written sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 587–586 B.C.E.

The theme of promise is addressed to Israel (the House of Jacob). On the day of doom they “shall wreak judgment on Mount Esau” (v. 21), inheriting its lands as part of a national resettlement in the promised land. The renewal of the ancient rivalry between Esau/Edom and Jacob/Israel will again result in the loss of the elder brother’s patrimony.

RELATION OF THE *HAFTARAH* TO THE *PARASHAH*

The narrative in the *parashah* and the prophecy in the *haftarah* stand at two opposite points in the historical spectrum of relations between Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom). The Torah narrative continues the account of the brothers’ relationship that began with embryonic and natal strife and assumed consequential proportions when Jacob deceived his father, Isaac, to obtain the blessing of the firstborn. As a result of the enmity engendered, Jacob fled to Paddan-aram where he married Leah and Rachel, assembled great wealth, and eventually made plans to return to his homeland at the divine behest. The *parashah* opens with Jacob sending messengers to Esau to placate his twin who is marching toward him with an army. Unexpectedly, Esau

receives his brother with a noble and generous spirit. The brothers separate in peace, each to his own land. National conflicts between their descendants lie in the distant future.

The *haftarah* takes us to the end of the biblical period, after Judah was exiled from its homeland and Edom participated in the downfall of the nation (cf. Ps. 137:7). The prophet indicts the elder “brother” for duplicity and arraigns him on charges of passive and active deceit. The roles of deceiver–deceived are now reversed, with fatal consequences for Edom. Obadiah predicts Edom’s destruction and dispossession. As a triumphant nation, Israel will consume Edom and resettle its homeland. What is more, this destruction is part of a scenario at “the end of days,” that will result in the restoration of God’s dominion over all.

It is not clear if the prophet saw Israelite restoration in world historical terms or as a case of national liberation. His rabbinic heirs clearly regarded the defeat of Edom as the end of historical tyranny and the onset of God’s universal kingship. This is because Edom had become a standard name for the hated Roman Empire. As a result, the prophecy of Obadiah fostered hopes for an end to this brutal domination and a restoration of national religious service. In due course, when Christendom assumed the mantle and the might of Rome, the name Edom received a new identity.

The encounter between Jacob and Esau marked by the *parashah* was dramatized in political terms through exemplifying Edom as imperial or medieval Rome and in religious terms through exemplifying Edom as the civil cult of Rome or as Christianity. For all postbiblical readers, Obadiah’s prophecy of liberators ascending Mount Zion to destroy Edom, and the anticipation of God’s dominion, was crucial. It was the

consolation preached by ancient Sages and recited by synagogue poets. Exemplary in this regard is the thematic centrality of Obad. 1:21 in Jewish liturgy, because it serves as one of the climactic verses in part of the *Rosh ha-Shanah Musaf* service (known as *Malkhuyot*), celebrating and proclaiming God's future kingdom or dominion. The verse also has a climactic presence

in the daily morning liturgy, where it occurs at the conclusion of *P'sukei d'Zimra* (an opening selection of biblical psalms and hymns before the call to worship [*Bar'khu*]). In both contexts, Obad. 1:21 is cited along with the prophecy of divine dominion in Zech. 14:9 ("And the LORD shall be king over all the earth; in that day there shall be one LORD with one name.")

1

The prophecy of Obadiah.

We have received tidings from the LORD,
And an envoy has been sent out among
the nations:

"Up! Let us rise up against her for battle."

Thus said my Lord GOD concerning Edom:

²I will make you least among nations,
You shall be most despised.

³Your arrogant heart has seduced you,
You who dwell in clefts of the rock,
In your lofty abode.

You think in your heart,

"Who can pull me down to earth?"

⁴Should you nest as high as the eagle,
Should your eyrie be lodged 'mong the
stars,

Even from there I will pull you down
—declares the LORD.

⁵If thieves were to come to you,

Marauders by night,

They would steal no more than they
needed.

Obadiah 1:1. The prophecy of Obadiah
The word translated as "prophecy" (*hazon*) literally means "vision."

We have received The plural form of the word translated as "we have received" (*shamannu*) is unexpected because there is only one

speaker. Ibn Ezra suggested that this reflects Obadiah's identification with other prophets like "Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Amos who prophesied against Edom."

3. You who dwell in clefts of the rock This image of living in a remote mountain fastness,

א

חזון עבדיה

כֹּה־אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה לְאֲדוֹם
שְׂמוּעָה שָׁמַעְנוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה
וַעֲזַר בַּגּוֹיִם שָׁלַח
קוֹמוּ וְנִקְוְמָה עֲלֶיהָ לְמִלְחָמָה:

² הִנֵּה קָטָן נִתְתִּירָה בַּגּוֹיִם

בְּזוּי אֶתְהָ מְאֹד:

³ זָדוֹן לִבְךָ הַשִּׁיאֶךָ

שִׁכְנִי בַחֲגוּרֵי־סֹלֶעַ

מְרוֹם שְׁבִתּוֹ

אָמַר בְּלִבּוֹ

מִי יוֹרְדֵנִי אֶרֶץ:

⁴ אִם־תִּגְבֶּיָה כַּנֶּשֶׁר

וְאִם־בֵּין כּוֹכָבִים שָׁיִם קִנְיָה

מִשָּׁם אוֹרִי־דָךְ

נֶאֱמַר־יְהוָה:

⁵ אִם־גִּבְּרִים בְּאוּרֵךְךָ

אִם־שׂוֹדֵדִי לְיָלֵה

אֵיךְ נִדְמִיתָה

If vintagers came to you,
They would surely leave some gleanings.
How utterly you are destroyed!
6How thoroughly rifled is Esau,
How ransacked his hoards!
7All your allies turned you back
At the frontier;
Your own confederates
Have duped and overcome you;
[Those who ate] your bread
Have planted snares under you.

He is bereft of understanding.

8In that day

—declares the LORD—

I will make the wise vanish from Edom,
Understanding from Esau's mount.
9Your warriors shall lose heart, O Teman,
And not a man on Esau's mount
Shall survive the slaughter.

10For the outrage to your brother Jacob,
Disgrace shall engulf you,
And you shall perish forever.
11On that day when you stood aloof,
When aliens carried off his goods,
When foreigners entered his gates
And cast lots for Jerusalem,
You were as one of them.

12How could you gaze with glee
On your brother that day,
On his day of calamity!
How could you gloat
Over the people of Judah

הָלוֹא יִגְנְבוּ דֵימָם
אִם-בְּצָרִים בָּאוּ לָךְ
הָלוֹא יִשְׁאִירוּ עֲלֵלוֹת:
6 אֵיךְ נַחֲפָשׁוּ עֵשׂוֹ
נִבְעָו מִצְפָּנָיו:
7 עַד-הַגְּבוּל
שְׁלַחֲוֹךָ כֹּל אֲנָשֵׁי בְרִיתְוֹךָ
הִשְׁיֵאוּךָ יִכְלוּ לָךְ
אֲנָשֵׁי שְׁלֹמְךָ
לְחֻמְךָ
יִשְׁיִמוּ מְזוֹר תְּחֻתֶיךָ

אֵין תְּבוּנָה בּוֹ:

8 הָלוֹא בַיּוֹם הַהוּא

נֶאֱמַר-יְהוָה

וְהִאֲבִדְתִּי חֻכְמִים מֵאֲדוֹם

וְתִבְוֶנָה מִהָר עֵשׂוֹ:

9 וְיַחֲתוּ גִבּוֹרֶיךָ תִימָן

לְמַעַן יִכְרַת-אִישׁ מִהָר עֵשׂוֹ

מִקְטָל:

10 מִחֻמַּס אַחִיךָ יֵעֲקֹב

תִּכְסֶּךָ בּוֹשָׁה

וְנִכְרַתָּ לְעוֹלָם:

11 בַּיּוֹם עֲמַדְךָ מִנְּגֵד

בַּיּוֹם שְׁבוֹת זָרִים חִילּוֹ

וְנִכְרָים בָּאוּ שַׁעֲרָיו

וְעַל-יְרוּשָׁלַיִם יָדוּ גוֹרָל

גַּם-אַתָּה כְּאַחַד מֵהֶם:

12 וְאַל-תִּרְאֵ

בַּיּוֹם-אַחִיךָ

בַּיּוֹם נִכְרוּ

וְאַל-תִּשְׂמַח

לְבִגְדֵי-הַיְהוּדָה

and thus beyond danger, portrays Edom's pride. (southeast of the Dead Sea), used here to designate Edom as a whole.
9. *Teman* A city and region in Edom

On that day of ruin!
 How could you loudly jeer
 On a day of anguish!
¹³How could you enter the gate of My
 people
 On its day of disaster,
 Gaze in glee with the others
 On its misfortune
 On its day of disaster,
 And lay hands on its wealth
 On its day of disaster!
¹⁴How could you stand at the passes
 To cut down its fugitives!
 How could you betray those who fled
 On that day of anguish!
¹⁵As you did, so shall it be done to you;
 Your conduct shall be requited.

Yea, against all nations
 The day of the LORD is at hand.
¹⁶That same cup that you drank on My
 Holy Mount
 Shall all nations drink evermore,
 Drink till their speech grows thick,
 And they become as though they had never
 been.
¹⁷But on Zion's mount a remnant shall
 survive,
 And it shall be holy.
 The House of Jacob shall dispossess
 Those who dispossessed them.
¹⁸The House of Jacob shall be fire,
 And the House of Joseph flame,
 And the House of Esau shall be straw;
 They shall burn it and devour it,

15. day of the LORD An anticipated time of judgment against Israel and the nations. It is first mentioned in Amos 5:18,20 and is usually depicted as accompanied by violent terrestrial and atmospheric disturbances (cf. this idiom in Ezek. 30:3 and Joel 1:15).

17. holy That is, inviolate. Compare Jer. 2:3, "Israel was holy to the LORD, / The first fruits of His harvest. / All who ate of it were held guilty."

בְּיוֹם אֲבָדָם
 וְאֵל־תִּגְדֹּל פִּיךָ
 בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
¹³אֵל־תִּבְּוֹא בְּשַׁעַר־עַמִּי
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדָם
 אֶל־תִּרְאֵה גַם־אֶתָּה
 בְּרַעְתּוֹ
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדוֹ
 וְאֵל־תִּשְׁלַחְנָה בְּחִילוֹ
 בְּיוֹם אִיָּדוֹ:
¹⁴וְאֵל־תִּעַמְדוּ עַל־הַפָּרֶקַע
 לְהַכְרִית אֶת־פְּלִיטָיו
 וְאֵל־תִּסְגֹּר שְׁרִידָיו
 בְּיוֹם צָרָה:
¹⁵כִּי־קָרוֹב יוֹם־יְהוָה
 עַל־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם
 כַּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתָ יַעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ
 גַּמְלָךְ יָשׁוּב בְּרֹאשְׁךָ:
¹⁶כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר שְׁתִּיתֶם עַל־הַיַּר קִדְשִׁי
 יִשְׁתּוּ כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם תָּמִיד
 וְשָׁתוּ וְלָעוּ
 וְהָיוּ כַּלּוּא הָיוּ:
¹⁷וּבְהָר צִיּוֹן תִּהְיֶה פְּלִיטָה
 וְהָיָה קִדְשׁ
 וַיִּרְשׁוּ בַּיִת יַעֲקֹב
 אֶת מוֹרְשֵׁיהֶם:
¹⁸וְהָיָה בֵּית־יַעֲקֹב אֵשׁ
 וּבֵית יוֹסֵף לְהַבָּה
 וּבֵית עֵשָׂו לְקָשׁ
 וְדָלְקוּ בָהֶם וְאָכְלוּם

And no survivor shall be left of the House
of Esau

—for the LORD has spoken.

¹⁹Thus they shall possess the Negeb and Mount Esau as well, the Shephelah and Philistia. They shall possess the Ephraimite country and the district of Samaria, and Benjamin along with Gilead. ²⁰And that exiled force of Israelites [shall possess] what belongs to the Phoenicians as far as Zarephath, while the Jerusalemite exile community of Sepharad shall possess the towns of the Negeb. ²¹For liberators shall march up on Mount Zion to wreak judgment on Mount Esau; and dominion shall be the LORD's.

18. for the LORD has spoken Hebrew: *ki YHVH dibber*. This formula gives divine authority to the prophet's words and was used to cite earlier prophecies at the time of their re-application to new circumstances. In this case, the reference is to the oracle against Edom recited by Balaam, in Num. 24:17. The same terms for dispossession and survival link the passages.

20. Zarephath A town on the Phoenician coast, also mentioned in 1 Kings 17:9 as being in the vicinity of Sidon.

Sepharad The Aramaic form of Sardis, a

וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה שְׂרִיד לְבַיִת עֵשָׂו
כִּי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר:
¹⁹וַיִּרְשׁוּ הַנֶּגֶב אֶת־הַר עֵשָׂו וְהַשְּׁפֵלָה
אֶת־פְּלִשְׁתִּים וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶת־שְׂדֵה אֶפְרַיִם
וְאֶת שְׂדֵה שְׁמֶרֶן וּבְנֵימָן אֶת־הַגְּלָעָד:
²⁰וְגַלְתִּי הַחֲלֵהָזָה לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־
כָּנְעָנִים עַד־צָרְפַת וְגַלְתִּי יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר־
בְּסַפְרָד יִרְשׁוּ אֶת עַרְי הַנֶּגֶב: ²¹וְעָלוּ
מוֹשְׁעִים בְּהָר צִיּוֹן לְשַׁפֵּט אֶת־הָר עֵשָׂו
וְהִיְתָה לִיהוָה הַמְּלֹכָה:

city in Asia Minor, as evidenced by an Aramaic-Lydia bilingua inscription. Targum Jonathan and all later Jewish interpreters understood this place as Spain. On this basis, the Jews of Iberian descent are called *Sfardim*.

21. For liberators shall march up This concluding allusion to the "liberators" (*moshi-im*) of Israel, who will "wreak judgment" (*lishpot*) on the enemy, makes use of the old language of saviors and judgment found in the Book of Judges (cf. Ibn Ezra). The liberators here came to be understood as the Messiah and his companions (Radak).